

OFFERING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO NATIVE FAMILIES: CLUES FROM A FOCUS GROUP

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And
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Introduction

Background and Purpose

In 1999, the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health was awarded Federal funding to conduct a focus group of Native American family members about their technical assistance needs and to report the findings in a written document for other technical assistance providers and Federal grantees. The experience of the focus group led the Federation not only to the culturally specific technical assistance needs of Native Families, but once again to those support, information and advocacy needs common to all families raising children with mental health issues. The goal of this report, therefore, is to provide a brief narration about the focus group, a summary of the learnings, the most immediate technical assistance needs and recommendations for technical assistance providers.

The Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, founded in 1989, is a national advocacy organization that serves to sustain and provide leadership for a diverse nation-wide network of family-run organizations. The Federation also serves to integrate the experience and knowledge of the membership and focus it as a force for positive change in systems serving children with mental health issues and their families.

Upon receipt of funding for this project, the Federation immediately issued subcontracts, funding a pre-existing partnership with the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) and B-C Family Productions. The Federation, NICWA and B-C Family Productions partnership synthesized current wisdom about family, culture and logistics.

NICWA, a Federally funded technical assistance provider, created a necessary link to the Circles of Care and the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and their Families Program grantees. Through their relationships with Tribal communities, they were able to invite family members and encourage grantees to support this project. NICWA also conducted the literature review, participated in planning the event and the agenda and co-facilitated the focus group.

B-C Family Productions' principle owner, Scott Bryant-Comstock provided logistical support for families and for the focus group meeting. B-C Family Productions has coordinated training events for family and professional collaborative events since 1992. Assistance with travel arrangements and on-the-spot problem solving for families is known to be a critical element to the comfort

and safety of families and to the success of any hosting event. The care and support given by Scott Bryant-Comstock to the children and women is a value that is honored by the Native American cultures. That kind of nurturing was important to building trust. Participants appreciated it and gave a special thanks to Scott Bryant-Comstock for this.

The focus group meeting was planned for April 2000 to coincide with the annual conference of the Portland State University's Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health in Portland, Oregon. This schedule minimized travel burdens and maximized learning opportunities for families. The two-day focus group meeting was split with one day preceding the conference and one-half day following the conference. The split, with conference participation in between, was intended to give families more information and to allow them to more clearly identify specific technical assistance needs.

Formation of InterTribal Voices of Children and Families

During the days of this focus group and the Portland conference, a larger group of Native families met for the third time to develop a new family organization. Two earlier meetings, held at Standing Rock and Rapid City, were supported in part by a small grant awarded and administered by the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health in November 1999. Funding for the grant came from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The development and guidance for this organization was sought and achieved through prayer. In Native tradition, all four parts of the human being are valued and respected: mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. These were honored at every step of development. At this, the third meeting, unanimous consensus was achieved to (1) organize under the umbrella of the national Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and (2) to adopt the name, InterTribal Voices of Children and Families.

Summary of the Literature Review

Kathryn Manness and Kathleen Earle of the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) conducted a literature review during the planning phase of this project. While there was an apparent absence of material specifically about technical assistance for American Indian/Alaskan Native families, there was literature from which relevant information could be extrapolated. Information about advocacy and organizing among Native people and general guidance about the provision of technical assistance to diverse populations of people was reviewed and summarized. The most basic tenet of the review concludes that "As Native American parents of children with severe emotional disturbances attempt to

establish themselves as effective advocates for their children, they will benefit from technical assistance tailored toward their unique cultural needs." (*Providing Technical Assistance to Native Americans: Literature Review*, NICWA, 2000, page 1)

There is reference within the literature review to the precedence of state and federal governments providing technical assistance to tribes and nations in attempt to assist them in becoming advocates for themselves. Thus, supporting the intention of the funding set forth for this project by the Federal Center for Mental Health Services. The Federal Center for Mental Health Services administers the *Comprehensive Community Services for Children and their Families Program* which in turn funds grants to several of the tribal communities involved in this focus group project. The need to learn more about appropriate provision of technical assistance to families in these grantee communities inspired the Center's fiscal support of this project.

One such federally funded grant cited in the literature review resulted in the formation of a regional alliance and ultimately influenced an improvement in services to children with hearing impairments through increased agency collaboration and community education. The two basic steps toward developing effective advocacy for creating systems change and improved services for children, according to the literature review, are:

- the formation of an organization with deep roots in the community and
- grassroots leadership.

The importance of community ownership, underscored by a history that demonstrates that true change cannot be successfully imposed from the outside, is evidenced by the federal and state governments' unsuccessful attempts to erase indigenous languages and cultures in the United States.

Finally, the literature review suggests that culturally appropriate service requires, first, an introspective examination of personal history and self-awareness. Perhaps it is from just such a historical awareness that the Federal Center for Mental Health Services recognized the need for grassroots guidance (and thus deemed this focus group worthy of funding), from the families of the grantee communities. This report, therefore, will tell the story of the focus group experience and offer recommendations to the *Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and their Families Program* and other programs in supporting technical assistance towards systems change for the benefit of Native children and their families.

The Focus Group

DAY ONE, APRIL 5, 2000:

Flip charts and facilitators in a hotel meeting room

The setting for the first day of the two-day focus group meeting was a hotel conference room that was too small for the number of people convened. There was one flip chart where questions, identified from NICWA's literature review, had been written as a discussion guide. Participants included approximately 30 family members from 22 Tribes, two facilitators from the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and NICWA, the Federation's Executive Director, and a representative from the federal Center for Mental Health Services.

As the meeting opened, one of the family members offered a prayer and a few others offered words about being together and the intentions they brought to this gathering. One by one, people introduced themselves, some by name and Tribe and some through oral tradition with stories. When each person had been recognized, the focus group began.

The focus group process was introduced with explanation about the funding source and the obligation to produce a report about how to improve technical assistance for Native families. The co-facilitators then introduced the focus group questions on the flip chart and a proposed process for the discussion. In response to this introduction, one family member stood and drew a comparison between the proposed agenda and questions written on the flip chart and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting where professionals have already made decisions and the family is invited in to "just sign on the line." It became clear that the objective of this focus group meeting, in itself, had only limited relevance to the needs of the people assembled and that it could not go forth until consensus was built. In Native tradition, things happen when it is time, when all are of one heart and mind. The process had to allow that to happen first. After several hours of discussion amongst the families about the potential value of a report, consensus was achieved and the "focus group" moved forward.

The dialogue that flowed from that point in time was deep and rich with stories of systems failures, distrust of mainstream culture, debates about solutions, petitions for support, exclamations of hope, tears, laughter, prayer songs, and proclamations of ownership of their own voices.

There was discussion about a grant opportunity that was proposed by someone in the room. The group decided that it was not a good fit for the newly forming organization and decided to pass on it. This led to deeper discussion about the importance of families taking information back to their respective tribes, their people, to receive guidance.

The families, astute about available resources and "right time", took the opportunity of this meeting to propose a relationship with the national Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. Their proposal called for a reconfiguration of the Federation's membership structure to honor their intertribal status as equal to that of statewide organizations. The proposal, to be carried back to the Federation's board for ratification, was based on Native families' need for representation parallel to that of mainstream citizens. Many tribes' reservations and communities cross state boundaries and would, therefore be divided under a statewide organization.

For the remainder of the day, the questions remained on the flip chart and were only occasionally referenced. The facilitators moved away from the front. They listened. They answered questions. Most importantly, they no longer assumed the tasks of facilitation.

DAY TWO, APRIL 8, 2000:

No flip charts or facilitators -- A bus trip to the beach

In an effort to learn from our challenges, and to honor the people who had traveled so far to give us information, we cancelled the hotel meeting room, rented a bus and invited the families to go to the beach. Early in the bus ride we offered some information about technical assistance possibilities, quit facilitating, and just went for the ride.

There were prayer songs, stories, naps, tears and laughter. There were hard discussions and challenging ideas. Talk transpired sometimes between the entire bus, sometimes just between seatmates, or across the isles.

When we arrived at the ocean, people scattered in all directions. For three and one-half hours people intermittently walked alone, shopped, ate, or walked together. Mind, body, spirit and emotion were engaged in an environment of tremendous natural beauty and the mission was never lost. Dreams, hopes and possibilities for Native children were expanded.

With twenty tribes represented in this group, an additional benefit was experienced in this opportunity as a cultural exchange and teaching among the peoples took place. The ocean, the sky, the dramatic land formations, and the shells scattered along the beach were more valuable than a thousand flip charts and a full day in class.

In the end, we had indeed heard what **we** (emphasis on we) needed for a focus group report. We had received specific technical assistance requests. And, the families had claimed the power of their own voices with the birthing and naming of the new family organization, Inter-Tribal Voices of Children and Families.

The return bus ride closed the circle of our experience. Someone offered a prayer calling the individual spirit back and honoring the beauty of the place we had visited, respecting the work we had done and petitioning for safe journeys home. There were more prayer songs, tears, laughter, and exclamations of hope for the future of all Native families and their children with mental health issues.

What We Learned

Underlying Assumptions

The assumptions underlying what was identified as relevant "learning" are as follows:

- The diversity of the 550 plus Native Nations in this country is recognized, but this cross section of families drew on several universal truths about family strengths and needs.
- The conclusions drawn in this paper must be recognized as very general and not specific to any one culture or tribal homeland.
- The common denominator of families in this focus group was children with mental health issues, dual nationality and general cultural compatibility with one another.

Native Families Need an Organization

Successful involvement of Native families in systems change through the Federal Circles of Care and the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and their Families Program grants will depend upon a strong and well-supported family-run organization. With the creation of InterTribal Voices of Children and Families, the potential for a network that will connect Native families across tribes to influence the improvement of services and supports with their collective wisdom, experience and passion has been launched into reality.

The importance of this organization to "family involvement in systems change" can be easily justified. Not only is there more than a decade of experience around the involvement of non-Native families and the national family organization, Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, but there is also an entire body of literature that explains the critical importance of "network/community of peers" to learning and practicing. One such recent publication is *The Social Life of Information* by John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid (Harvard Business School Press, 2000.)

Particular arenas critical to the evolution of this organization will require immediate and sustained attention from technical assistance providers and potential funding agencies. They include relevant and appropriate grant application criteria; access to funding, other resources and information; opportunities for learning; and technical assistance with organizational development.

NATIVE FAMILY-RUN ORGANIZATIONS WILL NEED RELEVANT AND APPROPRIATE GRANT APPLICATION CRITERIA

Currently most grant application criteria, whether Federal or private, call for family-run organizations to be either local or state-based. The Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services *Guidance for Application for Statewide Family Network Organizations*, for example, requires that successful applicants be state-based and limits the awards to one family organization per state. This is inappropriate for Native family organizations. Two of the more significant reasons include (1) Tribes are not defined by state boundaries and (2) Native families have dual-nationality issues that are not adequately addressed by state-based organizations. Grant application criteria need to be redefined to give access to both Tribal and intertribal family-run organizations.

One example of the many complications faced by Native families around issues of dual-nationality and the laws related to the education of their children is Article VII of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. The many possible implications of this Article on the education of the children can best be understood and addressed by a Native family organization that has the stories of their ancestors (history, we call that in an English education), the wisdom of their elders, the experience of reservations and the knowledge of their children's needs. Rather than to presume to offer a summative interpretation of this Article, it is offered here for the reader's review.

Fort Laramie Treaty (1868) Article VII

In order to insure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted, especially of such of them as are or may be settled on said agricultural reservations, and they, therefore, pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school, and it is hereby made the duty of the agent for said Indians to see that this stipulation is strictly complied with; and the United States agrees that for every thirty children between said ages, who an be induced or compelled to attend school, a house shall be provided, and a teacher competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education shall be furnished, who will reside among said Indians and faithfully discharge his or her duties as a teacher. The provisions of this article to continue for not less than twenty years.

<http://www/pbs.org/weta/thewest/wpages/wpgs640/ftlaram/htm>

NATIVE FAMILY-RUN ORGANIZATIONS WILL NEED FUNDING AND OTHER RESOURCES

Immediate core funding for InterTribal Voices of Children and Families is perhaps more critical to its viability than for most family run organizations. While the volunteer effort is rich and the commitment of the people is deep, the mere act of communication is expensive. Without resources for long-distance communication, families are isolated from one another, from the learning and from the work. As InterTribal Voices of Children and Families was formed, it included more than 30 family members from more than 20 Tribes, from Los Angeles California to the outbush of Alaska to the reservations in Northern Maine. In Native culture it is respectful to talk with a person face to face, not through the wires. Language is visual and body action is needed to get the full impact. So, the sharing of information between families and tribes is going to require funding that supports travel to meet and spend time with one another. The potential impact of resources spent by Circles of Care grantees to send two or five family members to national training events will not be realized without additional support to allow those family members to visit with others.

All that can be said about the need for core funding can be said about resources of other kinds. Native families are in need of immediate access to at least all of the resources available to rest of the nation-wide community, developed in support of systems change and the systems of care principles.

There are two strategic issues for Native families around access to resources and funding. The first is that resources, by definition, provide both opportunity and constraints. It will be important that Native families be given both clear and direct explanation about restrictions and obligations attached to any resources offered to them and time to decide among themselves if those constraints justify the resource. This will be true as well around issues of added-burden. For example, if a grant comes with obligations that are incongruent with the mission and vision of the Native family organization, it would do more harm than good. Another example is the potential burden added to families who travel to conferences.

The second issue is one common throughout history to people who have been oppressed or disenfranchised. Native cultures in this country have been long oppressed politically, socially and economically. Most families raising children with mental health issues, regardless of their culture, in this society have been oppressed and isolated through the mere experience of trying to negotiate safety and support in a myriad of inadequate and ineffective services, punitive codes and overwhelming stigma. All of these issues effect Native families exponentially.

Agencies, funders and others providing resources to Native family organizations should be mindful of the potential for unintended side effects of increased tension and internal competition. It will be important to listen to Native family organizations and support their internal efforts to grapple with such issues without imposing undue competition. Respecting the integrity of their organization should be a paramount guideline for any provider of resources, funding or otherwise.

NATIVE FAMILIES NEED ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Native families must have access to information from several critical sources. One source is experts. Oppressed people have been taught by mainstream culture that expertise resides in particular people or institutions anointed through academics and scientific research with degrees and titles like Ph.D. and university. Thus, families often need access to that kind of recognized expertise to inform their decisions and validate their advocacy.

Other sources of information and knowledge that are critical to Native families include tribal elders, spiritual leaders and spiritual healers. Families must be able to contact their elders, leaders and healers for participation and guidance.

The technical assistance providers must understand that access means more than simply making information available. Access means information is available in a language the people can read and understand and that it is delivered in respect and support of tribal protocol. And, it requires that time and support to meet with tribal elders, spiritual leaders and healers be provided.

NATIVE FAMILIES NEED OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING

Technical assistance provides information, experience and consultation to solve problems and change practice. Success depends upon translation of information into learning and understanding. For that to happen, Native families given technical assistance through training, experiences and consultation must also have the opportunity to go back to their people to share it and practice it. Information does not become knowledge or get translated into practice without community experience.

There is an additional dimension that must be pointed out here. Native families must have opportunities for learning and understanding through the provision of technical assistance. But, for that technical assistance to be respectful and useful, its providers must have opportunities for learning and understanding

Native families. Manaja Hill puts it this way, "If you want to learn about us, go to the library and read a book. If you want to understand us, come live with us."

NATIVE FAMILIES NEED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WITH ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The process of organizational development and leadership will look different because of Native traditions and values. Appropriate technical assistance will therefore have to be directed by the Native family organization. Some of the differences are that the Native family organization will seek guidance spiritually and will always strive for a balance of male and female. They will incorporate the mind, body, spirit and emotion and will work for consensus before taking action.

First and foremost will be the issue of on-going building of a deep and broad network of families within and between tribal communities. Resources and the independent control of those resources to support communication between families will be critical. This might include funding for conference calls, travel money, postage, database maintenance, and so on.

Opportunities to learn from other family-run organizations about their structures, processes, and successes would allow Native family leaders another rich source of information from which they could adapt strategies to fit their own needs. Skills development in areas like writing grant proposals, developing newsletters, and filing for 501-c-3 tax exempt status could be useful. Information about policy issues, legislative events, and funding opportunities should be disseminated to Native families in a timely manner and through avenues they deem most useful. Appropriate information dissemination might range from general mailings to information sharing events hosted by InterTribal Voices of Children and Families for families in various regions and communities. Again, the underlying "rule" should be that Native families, as a group, make decisions about what their next steps will be, when they will be and the use of any available resources.

Native Families Need Individual Support

Mainstream families raising children with mental health issues often face isolation and rejection in their communities, schools and churches based upon the stigma associated with behavior and mental health problems. The pain from that kind of oppression is felt even more deeply when they return to their neighborhood from a national conference, for example, where they have experienced the intimacy of a shared journey with other parents from other places.

Native families will experience that same lonely "withdrawal" upon returning from a national event where they have been with other families. But there is an additional challenge for them. Their isolation and oppression is far more historic and belongs to their entire tribal community. So, in addition to the loneliness they experience, they also face the jealousy and misplaced resentment from neighbors who have not had the opportunity - or are afraid of the challenge - to become empowered and make a better life for themselves and their children.

Support for families on this journey should include ways for them to reach out to their peers, mentors, and leaders at any time at any hour on any day. While respectful face to face communication is important, supportive connections may be made available by telephone or Internet. Families need resources for any kind of communication that will support their personal journey and the challenges they will face on it.

As with all families, Native families have the wisdom to guide, raise and protect their children with mental health issues. They own that wisdom. Anyone given access to that wisdom or allowed into the circle of a family has been granted an enormous gift that must be respected. That gift must also be recognized for what it is and what it is not. It is only access to someone else's wisdom and temporary guest status into someone else's family.

As with all families, technical assistance for individual Native families should aide their own individual empowerment and support to remember that they know what they need and how they need it. They need encouragement and information to empower themselves to advocate for their children, their own family, and their people. Native families need opportunities to learn advocacy strategies and receive support and empowerment from both their own traditional/cultural ways and those of mainstream society. No family member should ever be expected to assimilate mainstream strategies or ways. They should each have access to what they need to succeed in raising their children through their own ways.

Technical assistance, to be appropriate and successful will, therefore, have to be included in cultural ways. Technical assistance that seeks only to recognize Native ways, while still sitting in mainstream milieu will fail or, worse yet, do more harm. Technical assistance and support has to be concrete and tangible so families experience it as being real.

Native Families Need Terms and Labels Adapted to be Culturally Sensitive and to Do No Harm

The power of terms and labels must be respected. Three meetings and many prayers were used to name the new family organization, InterTribal Voices of Children and Families. The care and respect taken resulted in a title that carries the intention and the mission of the families that are united in their effort.

Terms and labels should be used according to their meaning and relevance to Native families. Here are only two examples.

- ***Native American***

Native American is not a term that feels inclusive to Alaskan families.

"Native Families" was the term selected by members of this focus group.

- ***Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)***

SED, DSM IV diagnoses and other medical model labels are generally not culturally relevant. There is an effort underway in several Native Nations to create definitions that give cultural meaning to these terms that must be used to access funding, services and supports for children who need them. Those efforts must be respected, supported and honored for families to include mainstream health systems in their traditional cultural values and healing ways.

"Children of a different way" is the phrase used to define the children served by the a system of care in South Dakota. One family member spoke to the power of that phrase. For him, it meant learning a different way of parenting and that his school would need a different way of teaching. The phrase honored the children (with mental health issues) as the messengers saying that a different way is needed to heal our communities.

Native Families Need to Identify and Coordinate Their Own Technical Assistance

The decisions about what technical assistance Native families should receive belong to Native families, not to national experts, grant administrators or funders.

As mentioned in the literature review section (see page XX), there has been a call to coordinate technical assistance in any given community to avoid contradictory messages and fragmentation. Certainly, technical assistance providers and other national leaders have a "balcony view" of many initiatives and from that, can draw conclusions about global needs and the technical assistance strategies that have proven effective for the majority of communities. But, they cannot assume that will always apply to every group of people or to every tribe or to every community. The different tribal ways and traditions must be respected. The guidance and support of the elders, the spiritual leaders and healers must be

valued. And, in the end, the families must decide what technical assistance they want, when they want it and how they will access it.

Native Families Need to Select Their Technical Assistance Providers

Technical assistance providers will be those chosen by Native families. They will be people who are trusted, possess knowledge deemed to be authentic and are able to deliver their information in a way that is respectful of Native protocol. They will include spiritual leaders, healers, elders and sometimes, invited experts from outside.

Native Families Need Appropriate Delivery of Technical Assistance

Technical assistance strategies will be dependent upon the families' tribal ways and protocols. Respect for the oral tradition, spiritual guidance, support from the elders, understanding of the importance of all the directions are some of the issues about which technical assistance providers will need guidance from the families. Some of the issues that were specifically identified by this focus group included the way agendas are developed and utilized; the processes that are implemented; the concept of meetings being facilitated; the environment in which meetings are held; and the concept and relevance of time as it is used in mainstream culture. These are described in the following sections.

THE USE OF AGENDAS, PROCESSES, AND FACILITATION WILL NEED TO BE ADAPTED

There is no agenda without ownership by the participants. Native families must participate in developing agendas for meetings and events in which they will be involved.

There is no process without respect and respectful actions. Native families engage in process in a complete way. First, there is prayer (usually recognizing and giving thanks to the creator) and honoring of all the people in attendance. There must be demonstrable evidence that the outsider technical assistance provider respects their ways and will not impose preconceived ideas.

Trust - or willingness to be vulnerable - that the process that evolves from Native families coming together will render what is needed at the proper time, whenever that may be.

Always the process of any meeting, training, gathering is a circle beginning with prayer and completing by coming full circle back to where it began.

THE ENVIRONMENT FOR MEETINGS MUST BE CAREFULLY CONSIDERED

The environment for any meeting is critical and must in some way incorporate the elements and the directions. Space, beauty and ability to form a group in a way that honors and respects the presence of every participant is curical. Never should any participant be embarrassed by having to pass in front of others to enter or leave.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IMPLEMENTATION WILL NEED TO BE DIFFERENTLY ATTACHED TO TIME

Clock time is artificial and has no relevance to the process of tapping wisdom and doing work. Things are done when it is time.

Why Trust is So Difficult

For years, those involved in systems change efforts have emphatically declared that trust between collaborative partners, especially between families and professionals, is a prerequisite for success. And yet, trust has remained elusive for many who have attempted, with all good faith, to create partnerships aimed at positive changes in the systems that serve and support children and their families. Efforts to build trust between 'partners' have included, for example, workshop exercises to acknowledge the reasons people in one group might distrust the people in another group. That kind of awareness raising is often enough to help people with a common goal commit to a shared plan of action. For people who have experienced terrible betrayal, serious abuse, and systematic discrimination by mainstream laws and policies, however, trust may be a far greater challenge.

Native families involved in this focus group honored the Federation's intent to write a paper that could help make appropriate technical assistance more accessible and available to them by sharing very intimate stories about the sources of their distrust in mainstream policies, laws and people. Some of these stories are summarized here. They are stories that may cause any reader sadness and horror. The reader of faint heart may wish to skip to the summary. The reader who seeks a deeper understanding of Native families and is willing to be vulnerable, however, should read and consider the following stories.

- A father told the story of his family home, one that had been occupied for many generations, taken by the government without permission or compensation. While he and his family stood on a nearby hill, they watched the land and the house disappear beneath floodwater as a river was diverted to a new path.
- A grandmother told the story about her uncle being skinned alive for his hide to be hung on a wall alongside the skins of animals.
- Mothers told stories about their childhood experiences of frequent physical, emotional and sexual abuse in boarding schools run by white people.
- Other mothers told stories about trying to rediscover their tribal languages and spiritual practices. Their own languages and spiritual practices had been deemed criminal and punishable behavior until just 25 years ago.

- A mother told us that the grandmothers in her community still keep a hiding place in the woods prepared for the children. They still fear that the white people will come and take them away.
- A grandmother told us about a tribal community of no more than 1200 people whose 300 children were taken away during an outbreak of tuberculosis. Those children were adopted out to white families in the mid-west. They were not returned when the tuberculosis was eradicated from their community.
- Fathers and mothers taught us about their mandated documents. Native families still today are required to carry cards identifying them as Native in a way that no other people have been required to do - except the Jews prior to the Holocaust.

Perhaps we should consider

- respect,
- understanding,
- appropriate adaptation, and
- cultural sensitivity

as prerequisites for success in building collaborative relationships for systems change with Native families. Or with any families who have experienced the dangerous implications of discrimination and marginalization. Perhaps the expectation of trust prior to healing or systems change success is unrealistic.

Summary

In summary, this meeting afforded the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health a far greater opportunity for learning than anticipated. A decade old organization that takes pride in having a richly diverse membership, board and staff, we discovered the need for new adaptations to welcome Native families into our organization. Structures, ideas and approaches were proposed to us that will improve our technical assistance strategies so that we may more appropriately and effectively support the development of Native family-run organizations and of Native family leadership.

The value of this meeting was summarized by Manaja Hill:

1. It reinforced the need for direct family voice (we know our kids) and the need for family voice through the traditional/cultural ways.
2. It unified attending tribal people to pursue positive change in the treatment of the children.
3. It redefined the avenues to create change.
4. It may be the start of a means of reconciliation between peoples and the government.

The Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health is thankful for all the Native families who shared their stories and their time, for the collaborative work by the National Indian Child Welfare Association, for the support from B-C Family Productions and for the funding from the Federal Center for Mental Health Services. We are especially grateful to Manaja Unjinca Hill and Shannon CrossBear who served as advisors and reviewers during the drafting of this report.