

PATHWAY TO HOPE - HEALING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Ending Denial and Silence in Alaska Native Communities

Project Description: In the fall of 2004, a small group of Alaska Native people who had been providing victim services and healing and wellness activities in different Tribal communities throughout Alaska were invited to develop the vision for a video to end silence and denial about child sexual abuse in Alaska Native communities and families. The advisory group included elders as well as young adults and Tribes who received a U.S. Department of Justice Children's Justice Act Partnerships for Indian Communities grant to address child sexual abuse. After two days of facilitated discussion, the group identified and formatted the core messages seen in the Pathway to Hope video and guidebook. They envisioned a time when Alaska Native people would come together statewide and begin the process of ending silence and supporting child victims. A video and community discussion guidebook emerged from their vision and multi-generational, multi-tribal, and interagency collaboration.

The forty (40) minute video was designed and developed to strengthen tribal community responses to child victimization and to support community healing from historical child abuse. The video was produced in two twenty (20) minute segments as an educational resource and is supplemented by a facilitator's guidebook. The video is only available to individuals who complete the tribal facilitator training or in special circumstances to individuals who have demonstrated the ability to facilitate community dialog as well as assist Native survivors of child sexual abuse victimization in their healing journey.

The Pathway to Hope: Healing Child Sexual Abuse video reflects the voices of more than 40 Native people - both men and women - from diverse communities and cultural heritages who were interviewed for the project; most of those interviewed are child sexual abuse survivors. The interviews were conducted on location at nine (9) different sites throughout Alaska.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES BEHIND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PATHWAY TO HOPE: HEALING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE VIDEO AND GUIDEBOOK TOOLS

1. Indigenous People/Tribal Communities must take responsibility for the safety and healing of children.
2. Indigenous People/Tribes must have ownership of social problems as well as the development of solutions to those problems.
3. Reclaiming and reviving cultural values, beliefs, practices to heal children and those victimized as children must begin with understanding historical trauma and in multi-generational dialog.
4. Ongoing mentoring and support for "Indigenous couriers of community change" is essential for Tribal communities to achieve long-term change in attitudes and responses toward children who were victims of sexual abuse.

TOPIC AREAS COVERED IN TRAINING TRIBAL COMMUNITY FACILITATORS ON THE PATHWAY TO HOPE - HEALING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE VIDEO

Applying indigenous learning style and experiential approaches, our faculty guides and instructs participants on issues relating to child sexual abuse dynamics and victimization, healing and wellness for indigenous communities, and community empowerment strategies.

In this three (3) day interactive training and dialog, faculty members teach and facilitate participant exploration of the following truths, concepts, and beliefs:

1. Impact of multi-generational and historical trauma on safety of children now
2. Recognizing that there are “protections” that prevent us from:
 - BELIEVING THAT CHILDREN ARE SEXUALLY ABUSED;
 - HOLDING ABUSERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR BEHAVIOR;
 - ENDING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
3. Understanding how children experience sexual abuse;
 - Vulnerability, range of signs/behaviors, emotional impact, short-term/long-term;
 - Perpetrator profiles, vulnerability of children, etc.
4. Evaluating community readiness to end denial about child sexual abuse and begin healing
 - Identify knowledge about child sexual abuse;
 - Identify resources available to address child sexual abuse;
 - Identify attitude of Tribal and spiritual leaders about child sexual abuse
5. Four (4) *ACTION STRATEGIES* toward achieving community ownership to end silence about child sexual abuse and establish support for children:
 - Coming together to celebrate and honor our children;
 - Teaching adults and children about personal safety;
 - Setting community standards about children;
 - Healing and support for children when victimized
6. Promoting healing and support for children victimized by sexual abuse
 - Appropriate responses by the criminal justice system;
 - Culturally relevant, supportive services for child and non-offending family member
 - Community, extended family, education system and family support for child’s healing in short and long-term

The Pathway To Hope project was originally developed under the leadership of Diane Payne, who was the Children’s Justice Specialist for the Tribal Law & Policy Institute in Alaska that closed in October 2009. Diane is the owner/director of Justice for Native Children and continues to provide training and support to end silence and denial about child sexual abuse and promote healing for Native children, families and communities.

To request “Training of Tribal Community Facilitators” or related information, contact Diane Payne, Justice for Native Children Project at justice4nativechildren@gmail.com, or at 907-230-3936.

When we can heal ourselves, we also heal our ancestors, our grandmothers, our grandfathers, and our children.

When we heal ourselves, we heal Mother Earth.”

Rita Pitka Blumenstein, Yup’ik Great Grandmother, Indigenous Council of Thirteen Grandmothers