



# TRIBAL YOUTH RESOURCE CENTER Newsletter

*Indigenizing programs for Native youth*



## Roots of Resilience: Empowering Our Most Vulnerable Youth

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER VOL.3 | ISSUE 2

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# An Update & Welcome from the Tribal Youth Resource

## Greetings Relatives,

For the past six years, the Tribal Youth Resource Center team at the Tribal Law and Policy Institute has been honored to have served as the training and technical assistance center for Tribal Youth Programs and Youth Healing to Wellness Courts, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.



Late in the afternoon on the fall equinox, we received official notice that the Tribal Youth Resource Center will continue to serve in this capacity for the next four years. We are deeply grateful and humbled to have received the gift of continued relationship with each of you -- to work alongside of you, to learn from your wisdom, to lift up your voice, and to contribute to your programs as you serve the youth and families in your communities. We believe that it was no coincidence that we received word of the cooperative agreement award on the fall equinox. As a team, we will be guided by the teachings that our people and communities have embraced for generations with this change of seasons, to "release what no longer serves us well and embrace the importance of giving back," and we will strive to work with the rooted values of compassion, responsibility, courage, generosity, commitment, and love for the most vulnerable in our communities – LGBTQIA2S+\*, justice-involved/impacted, & unsheltered Native youth.

Respectfully,  
The Tribal Youth Resource Center

*\*Note that LGBTQIA2S+ is defined and further explored in the article beginning on [page 6](#).*



# Invitation, Resources, & Announcements from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

SHAPING  
THE  
NEXT **50**  
YEARS

## 2024 National Conference on Youth Justice

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

We are thrilled to invite you to **register early** for the **2024 National Conference on Youth Justice: Shaping the Next 50 Years**, taking place from **November 19 to November 21** at the **Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C.**

### Why Attend?

- **Enhance Your Knowledge and Skills on the JJDP Act:** Participate in interactive workshops and sessions tailored to enhance your understanding of this landmark legislation.
- **Engage with Experts:** Hear from leaders and innovators who are shaping the future of youth justice.
- **Engage in Community:** Connect with peers including those from Purpose Areas 8 and 9, mentors, and potential collaborators from across the country.
- **Connect with OJJDP:** Meet OJJDP Leadership and Program Managers.

### Event Highlights:

- **Keynote Speakers:** Hear from the bestselling author of *Just Mercy* and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, Bryan Stevenson, and professor and researcher Dr. Shawn Ginwright (invited).
- **Over 90 Sessions:** With a focus on the continuum of care, topics specific to the incorporation of indigenous culture into youth programming, learn about topics such as juvenile justice reform, how to use data to improve programming, and much more!
- **Tribal Grantee Pre-Conference:** Connect with OJJDP on November 18th from 10:00am-12:00pm for an optional tour of the National Museum of the American Indian. The pre-conference is from 1:00pm-5:00pm and will include a Listening Session using the Indigenous Model of Community Cafés, break-out sessions, a meet-and-greet, and a warm welcome from OJJDP Administrator Liz Ryan. If you have questions about the pre-conference or listening session please [click here](#).
- **Emerging Leaders:** Hear from juvenile justice advocates ages 18-25 with lived experience.
- **Film Screening:** Stay to view and participate in a screening of the film "[Juvenile: 5 Stories](#)" and a post-screening discussion with Administrator Ryan on Tuesday, November 19 from 5:15 to 6:15 p.m.



## Register Today!

Secure your registration at the conference now. The conference fee of \$150 will give you access to all sessions for the pre-conference and all three days of the conference. Click the link below to register and learn more about the agenda, speakers, and accommodations.

Register Now:

- [Register as an Tribal Grantee.](#)
- [Register as a chaperone.](#)
- [Register as a minor under 18.](#)

Access to early registration should not be shared. OJJDP plans to open registration for the public in September. We look forward to seeing you in Washington, DC and supporting the 2024 National Conference and the 50th Anniversary of the JJDP Act.

For additional questions, reach out to [OJJDPConference2024@Saxmanone.com](mailto:OJJDPConference2024@Saxmanone.com).

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# Funding Opportunities

## **Visit the Tribal Funding Directory**

*The purpose of this directory of grant resources is to make grantmaking more equitable for Tribal applicants seeking support for law enforcement purposes and for the provision of services to victims and survivors. These grants support a wide range of effective criminal justice, prevention, intervention, reentry, and victim services activities.*

## **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

*Tribal Funding Opportunities include the Native Connections Grant, Tribal Opioid Response Grants, and Circles of Care Grant.*

## **OJJDP Funding Webpage**

*The OJJDP funding page includes the Department of Justice Program Plan, funding opportunities specific to youth, applicant resources, funded projects, performance measures, and so much more.*



## **Justice Department to Award More Than \$84M in Grants to American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes**

The Justice Department has awarded 152 grants to 90 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes through its Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation (CTAS), totaling more than \$84 million.

Attorney General Merrick B. Garland announced these awards during a Justice Department and Department of the Interior convening with Tribal leaders, advocates, members of the media, and federal officials to discuss how media coverage can be channeled to help address the crisis of missing or murdered Indigenous peoples (MMIP) and human trafficking (HT).

The grants awarded under CTAS are designed to help enhance Tribal justice systems and strengthen law enforcement responses, improve the handling of child abuse cases, combat domestic and sexual violence, support Tribal youth programs, and fund an array of services for American Indian and Alaska Native crime victims. The CTAS awards are administered through the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office).

"We have heard from Tribal leaders about the complex public safety challenges their communities are facing and about the innovative and culturally appropriate solutions they propose to meet those challenges," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Brent J. Cohen of OJP. "These investments in Tribal community safety infrastructure, Tribal youth programs, law enforcement activities in Indian country, and services for American Indian and Alaska Native survivors represent a strong and steady commitment on the part of the Office of Justice Programs to the safety of Tribal communities..."

**[Read the Full Article](#)**

**[View the FY 2024 Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation \(CTAS\) Combined Award List](#) or learn more [CTAS General Information](#).**

# "I know who I am as a person"

## Sexual & Gender Identity from the Tribal Youth Perspective

**Youth are bringing us back to where we were,"** Tasha R. Mousseau JD (*Wichita and Affiliated Tribes, Kiowa, Caddo, and Hunka Oglala Lakota*) began, welcoming attendees to the June TYRC Online Learning Event, "Tribal Youth Perspective: Sexual and Gender Identity in Indian Country." Over the next 75 minutes, the three panelists, Kennedy Fridia (*she/her; Wichita, Kiowa, Caddo, Hunka Oglala Lakota*), Heath Red Owl (*he/they; Oglala Lakota*), and Misty Sandoval (*she/her; Dine and Seminole*) shared stories, reflections, and wisdom connected to their experiences as LGBTQIA2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, Two-Spirit)-identifying youth.

Following a beautiful opening from TYRC Young Leader Isabella Fridia (*Wichita, Kiowa, Caddo, Hunka Oglala Lakota*), Tasha shared a brief history of how colonization continues to shape perceptions of LGBTQIA2S+ identities within Tribal communities. "Once LGBTQIA folks became marginalized, we removed this strength and this resource that existed always in our Tribal communities," she explained. "In order to be stronger, healthier communities that thrive into the future... [we have to] uplift this love that can be shared across gender lines."

Kennedy, Misty, and Heath each took turns answering a series of questions about their sexual and gender identity, experiences expressing their authentic selves, and suggestions for how Tribes and programs



can more effectively support their LGBTQIA2S+ youth. While excerpts of their responses are included in this article, we invite you to [view the PPT and watch the recording of the full session.](#)

### **What is your experience in sharing your authentic self with family and community?**

With regards to their individual stories of "coming out," or expressing elements of their sexual and/or gender identity with others, experiences varied across the three panelists. While Kennedy noted that she felt immediately accepted by her family and her moms, who also identify as part of the LGBTQIA2S+ community, Misty shared that her experience was more challenging, as she felt she unaccepted for something beyond her control. For Heath, the experience of sharing this part of himself revealed the importance of "surrounding yourself with the right group."



## What feelings does your generation have on gender/sexual identity?

All of the panelists agreed that younger generations have a more open-minded approach to varying gender and sexual identities than previous generations. "Our generation is based on being comfortable, being yourself, loving the people you want to love," Heath said. Both Kennedy and Misty agreed, and Misty added that "our grandparents and parents didn't have the option the way we do to be socially accepted by family and friends." This idea was further explored in the next question.

To read or listen to more first-person stories from Native LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, visit these resources:

- [Our Stories | Paths Remembered](#)
- [LGBT - Two Spirit - We R Native](#)
- [Lived Experience: Shea's Story - YouTube](#)
- [Five LGBTQ & two-spirit Native American people who are making the world a better place - LGBTQ Nation](#)

## How do you feel older generations address sexual and gender identity in your community?

"The older generation didn't have the option [to come out]," Misty reflected, as she recounted a recent conversation she had with an adult in her community. "I had an adult come out to me and say, 'I'm really thankful that your younger generation is becoming more accepting because I couldn't tell this to my parents and they passed away before I could even tell them.'" Misty connected a fear of discrimination and the stigma

## What does "LGBTQIA2S+" stand for?

### What do these words mean?

**Lesbian:** A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women.

**Gay:** A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

**Bisexual:** A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender (often interchangeable with Pansexual).

**Transgender:** People whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth

**Queer:** A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream.

**Intersex:** People who are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy.

**Asexual:** Asexual (or "Ace") refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others.

**Two-Spirit:** Two-Spirit is a term used to describe an Indigenous person who embodies both masculine and feminine qualities, often encompassing a spiritual and gender identity outside the binary.

**+**: A symbol used to recognize the many sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of the community (beyond LGBTQIA2S).

Definitions adapted from [What does it mean to identify as Two-Spirit? \(pointofpride.org\)](#) and [Glossary of Terms - Human Rights Campaign \(hrc.org\)](#). It is important to note that the terms included here are not all-encompassing and do not reflect the entirety of the gender/sexuality spectrums.

surrounding LGBTQIA2S+ identities to the older generation's approach to sexual and gender identity. Kennedy acknowledged that the extensive amount of quickly changing knowledge required to understand and discuss the spectrum of gender and sexual identities may be a barrier for folks who truly *do* want to engage in meaningful support for LGBTQIA2s+ youth. She emphasized the importance of "connecting the older generations with the younger generations [through] things like this webinar [to give] the older generation something to reference to." Heath shared a personal story about their relationship with their family to support this idea. "When I came out, I was trying to be as informative as possible regarding how I identify and what my future looks like."



### **What are your pronouns? Why does it matter? What does it feel like to be misgendered?**

All three panelists agreed that, when shared, respecting the pronouns that a person chooses to use is a way to show respect for that person's identity. Kennedy began by stating that she uses she/her pronouns. While she noted that she has never been misgendered (referenced using the wrong gender) because, to others, she "looks like a she/her and acts like a she/her," she emphasized the importance of using someone's preferred pronouns in order to "validate them and who they are." Misty, who also uses she/her pronouns shared, "I'm a bit masculine, but I like feeling feminine." For Misty, being misgendered is painful. She noted that, for members of the transgender community (individuals who do not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth), "some do not have the choice to *not* use pronouns. They have to elaborate." Heath, who uses he/they pronouns, agreed that respecting others' pronouns is a way of validating that person's identity. Heath also shared that they recognize that they appear more feminine, so they are sometimes misgendered by folks who assume they use different pronouns. They shared that this doesn't bother them, as "I know who I am as a person."

To learn more about starting conversations with youth in your community about sexual and gender identity, visit these resources:

- [Indigenizing Love: A Toolkit for Native Youth to Build Inclusion | United for Youth](#)
- [Tate Topa Consulting](#)
- [LGBTQI and Two-Spirit People - The Resource Basket](#)
- [Sharing Our Lived Experiences: 22 Tips for Caring for Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Youth in the Child Welfare System](#)
- [Working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning/queer youth](#)
- [The Pride Justice Resource Center: The National Resource Center on Justice-Involved LGBTQ2S+ Youth](#)

To learn more about pronouns, the range of sexual and gender identities, and how to talk to someone about their pronouns, visit these resources:

- [Glossary of Terms - Human Rights Campaign \(hrc.org\)](https://www.hrc.org/glossary)
- [Definitions | The Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Life | Vanderbilt University](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/olgbt/definitions)
- [Free & Equal: United Nations for LGBT Equality: Fact Sheet: Intersex](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/poverty/data-inequality/lgbt/)
- [What does it mean to identify as Two-Spirit? \(pointofpride.org\)](https://www.pointofpride.org/what-does-it-mean-to-identify-as-two-spirit/)
- [New study shows transgender and nonbinary youth attempt suicide less when allowed to change name, gender marker - The Boston Globe](https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/health/new-study-shows-transgender-and-nonbinary-youth-attempt-suicide-less-when-allowed-to-change-name-gender-marker/)

## "Hot Topics" in the LGBTQIA2S+ Community

During one part of the panel discussion, Kennedy, Misty, and Heath shared their thoughts on "hot topics" in the LGBTQIA2S+ community today, including gender in sports, ceremony, and parenting. With regards to ceremony, Kennedy began by sharing about her grandmother who identifies as transgender, who would Sun Dance with men. Misty continued, "all I can say is: **decolonize ceremony**. We've had Two-Spirit people run ceremonies because they have both masculine and feminine spirits -- they're able to see both sides." Instead, Misty said, "when I go to ceremony, there's no place for us to participate, to voice opinions...this is for your own spirituality - why are we telling people what they should do, how they should dress [in ceremony]?"

With regards to parenting, Heath emphasized the importance of emotional availability as a parent of an LGBTQIA2S+-identifying youth. "This should be one of our top priorities with LGBTQ children," he said. Kennedy agreed, echoing that "at the end of the day [regardless of your kid's sexuality or gender], all that matters is if you're being a good parent."

To learn more about parenting or supporting parents of LGBTQIA2S+ youth, visit these resources:

- [Parenting Two Spirit and Indigiqueer Youth FAQ | Paths Remembered](#)
- [Are You an Askable Parent? - Advocates for Youth](#)
- [Welcome to the Family Acceptance Project<sup>®</sup> | Family Acceptance Project<sup>®</sup> \(sfsu.edu\)](#)
- [Find Resources - PFLAG](#)
- [Supporting Your Child's Gender Identity with Tavi Hawn](#)

## How can Tribes and programs support?

The final question of the event was centered around what Tribes and programs can do. Tasha outlined ideas for how Tribes and programs can support through government (proclamations, ordinances, and legislation that involves youth and supports youth), events (color runs, youth Pride Camps, drag shows, and parades), and programming (traditional teachings, webinars, and resource development). Each panelist, when asked about what they would like to see more of in terms of support, focused on a different avenue.



Heath emphasized the impact of effective educational programming in the community, to ensure that individuals and programs have access to information around gender and sexual identity and the unique needs associated with those identities. Kennedy spoke about the need for ongoing communication on issues impacting LGBTQIA2S+ people, including Talking Circles and other fun events that get people actively involved. Misty shared about the importance of "strength in numbers" when it comes to legislation. "What I'm concerned about is the safety of LGBTQ and Two-Spirit people; [we need to] come together to make sure that we're employing policies that are safe for the community."

The event ended with a feeling of overwhelming, shared gratitude for the young panelists' openness and readiness to share their reflections and wisdom about how community members can truly uplift their LGBTQIA2S+ youth. As Tasha reflected, "when we humanize these categories that people are placed in, it helps us to be better relatives... We have to bring our [LGBTQIA2S+] relatives back into the fold."



To learn more about building supportive programming for LGBTQIA2S+ youth, visit these resources:

- [LGBTQ2S \(Two-Spirit\) Resources | SOUTHWEST INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S COALITION \(swiwc.org\)](#)
- [Two Spirit & LGBTQ | Paths Remembered](#)
- [National LGBTQ Task Force \(thetaskforce.org\)](#)
- [HOME | Montana TwoSpirit Society](#)
- [Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirits](#)
- [Knowledge that has the power to heal. Opportunities & Programs - The Trevor Project](#)

Article by: Tribal Youth Resource Center Staff in collaboration with Kennedy Fridia, Heath Red Owl, and Misty Sandoval. Thank you, Kennedy, Heath, & Misty, for your readiness to share your stories with us and all who attended the panel. We are immensely grateful for your voices.

All resources linked above can also be found on the [Tribal Youth Resource Center Two-Spirit and Native LGBTQ+ Resource Page](#). We encourage you to visit the page, explore, and reach out to your assigned TTA Specialist with any questions or training needs.



# LGBTQIA2S+ Care is Trauma-Informed Care

Sometimes we hear organizations say, “we have done a lot to become a trauma-informed organization, but we haven't done much in this area.” When this happens, it creates a disconnect in what we mean when we say trauma-informed care. It then causes us to uplift certain types of traumas and diminish and oppress or ignore other types of traumatic experiences. It also causes us to better serve individuals whose identities are the “norm” than those with historically excluded identities.

Since diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts have become more widespread, people have advocated for centralizing affirming sexual and gender identity in trauma-informed care. It has become even more synonymous. You can't have one without the other. This is especially true for youth with intersecting identities like those who identify as American Indian and Alaska Native and LGBTQIA2S+ in some way.

It may feel unsafe for youth to feel comfortable disclosing to us their identities for fear of how we might react or respond to them. Even if we may not have anyone openly identifying, we should continue to consider that it doesn't mean they aren't in our care. They may wonder things like, “if I disclose this, will I be accepted here?” or even worse, “if I disclose this, will I be harmed again?” We can help to provide comfort to these thoughts by creating spaces that are physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and culturally safe for those from diverse identities. We can also remember to define safety from their perspectives and not just ours.

It is refreshing to see this topic and resources of this newsletter further centralize the importance of intentionally centralizing this issue in trauma-informed care.

*-Dr. Maegan Rides At The Door, Director, National Native Children's Trauma Center*

The National Native Children's Trauma Center would like to highlight LGBTQ+ Trauma-informed Care | SAMHSA and LGBTQI and Two-Spirit People - The Resource Basket as tools to support our work for and with LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit youth. We invite you to explore the resources linked in this piece as well and to reach out to your TTA Specialist with TA needs around trauma-informed, gender and sexuality-affirming care.



# United in Vision: Community Planning in Action

Check out some snapshots from strategic planning sessions! The TYRC Team is proud to work alongside so many incredible communities as they map out the next steps of their programming.



## CHICKASAW NATION

Chickasaw Nation (left), an FY23 OJJDP Juvenile Healing to Wellness Court grantee community, met virtually with TYRC JHWC TTA Specialist, Ashley Anderson, for a strategic planning session to build out their JHWC.

## PINOLEVILLE POMO NATION

Pinoleville Pomo Nation (right), an FY23 OJJDP Tribal Youth Program grantee community, came together in July 2024 for a wonderful, in-person strategic planning session with TYRC TYP TTA Specialist and Program Coordinator Laura Smith.



## CHOCTAW NATION

In June 2024, Choctaw Nation (left), an FY23 OJJDP Tribal Youth Program grantee, welcomed TYRC Director Stephanie Autumn and TYRC TYP TTA Specialist Deborah Tobacco for a strategic planning session.



## YAVAPAI-APACHE NATION

Yavapai-Apache Nation (right), an FY23 OJJDP Tribal Youth Program grantee, welcomed TYRC Director Stephanie Autumn in September for a strategic planning session. The photo included is of the great seal of the Yavapai-Apache Nation!





# Imagining a 'New Day' for Native Youth Who Are Justice-Involved/Impacted

“

When we tap into our culture, we find ancestral pathways to healing and power that cannot be denied.

- Veronica Very

”

Fall is the season that our people believe that we let go of what is not serving us well, and plan for the next four seasons and for the next seven generations. The Tribal Youth Resource Center (TYRC) is committed to collaborating with you and your communities to envision and work towards generating strategies that will result in improved life outcomes and self-fulfilling futures for Native youth who are justice-involved/impacted.

A vision we embrace at the TYRC is: within the next ten years, Native youth incarceration facilities will be transformed into Native Youth Healing Centers, leading to the decimation of the school-to-prison pipeline that continues to escalate across Indian Country. As of 2021, Tribal youth were **3.7 times as likely** to be detained or committed in juvenile facilities as their white peers, according to nationwide data collected in October 2021 and recently released. This ratio is essentially unchanged from 2011.

## What We Know for Sure:

- Youth who are detained are less likely to complete high school or find employment.
- Worsened health outcomes: When children are pulled from their communities and thrust into the instability that comes with temporary detention, their health often suffers as a consequence -- in ways that are both immediately observable and long lasting.
- Disproportionate punishment: For young people who are African American, Latinx, and American Indian, the likelihood of detention is greater than for their white counterparts, even when controlling for the seriousness of offense and the prior history of the individual.
- Lifetime consequences: According to research, young people who are confined in detention centers while decisions on their cases are pending experience more negative outcomes than their counterparts who are able to remain at home during this time. Youth who are detained are also more likely to see further involvement in the criminal justice system (such as future arrests) than those who are not.
- A price paid by the whole community: Detaining children not only impacts their lives, but also comes at a high cost to their entire community. Temporarily confining youth costs approximately \$1 billion each year.

- Lack of current data on Native youth who are incarcerated in county, state, and federal facilities continues to be the principal barrier that Tribal Nations and communities face in their efforts to develop response and support plans for Native youth who are justice-involved/impacted.
- The Indian Child Welfare Act does not require Tribal notification when a Tribal youth is involved in a state or local juvenile justice system. Thus, Tribes may be unaware of Tribal youth involvement in a state or local juvenile justice system.

**We Don't Know What We Don't Know:**

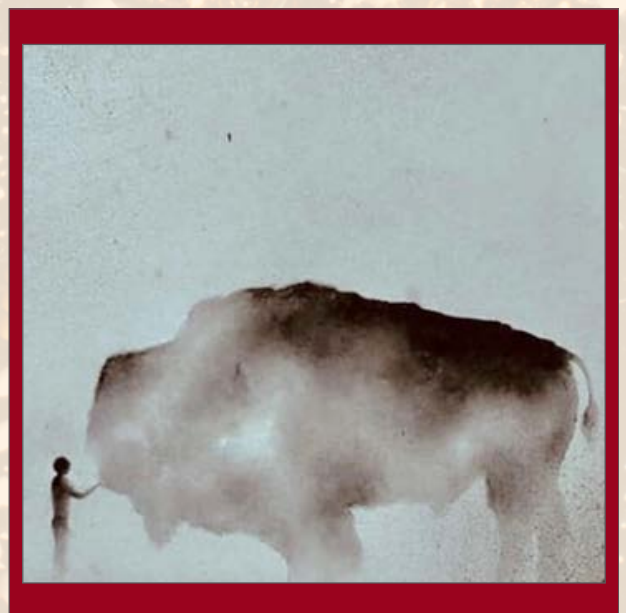
Eight months ago, the TYRC launched a data scan focusing on incarcerated Native youth in the state of Minnesota. The purpose of this data scan is to acquire a better understanding of the availability of access to quality, reliable data that can yield a better composite snapshot on the incarceration of Tribal youth in federal, state, and Tribal detention facilities. The data will inform Tribes in Minnesota, Native organizations, and Minnesota state agencies on how to best partner and respond to the pre, during, and post-release needs of Native youth who are justice-involved/impacted to increase their successful return to family and community.

We encourage **every** OJJDP Tribal Youth Program and Youth Healing to Wellness Court grantee to discuss with your assigned TYRC training and technical assistance provider what you know, don't know, and what you would like to know moving forward about the needs of your

youth who are justice-involved/impacted and how your OJJDP-funded program might better serve those youth. The TYRC can support your program, Tribe, and community in building the capacity to provide prevention and intervention services that can contribute to the decrease in the number of youth impacted by the justice system in your Tribe/community in the future. Please [contact the TYRC](#) if you have any questions or interest in the following programs:

- 1. Working with Justice-Involved Youth Training ([National Native Children's Trauma Center](#))**
- 2. Gathering of Native Americans for Adults & Youth (GONA) Training**
- 3. Project Venture Resources**
- 4. 7th Generation Mentoring Program Training**
- 5. We Are Living Arts (WALA) Training**
- 6. Indigenous Model of Restorative Practices Training**
- 7. The Canoe Journey Resources**
- 8. Youth Culture Camps Resources**
- 9. Horse Healing Camp Resources**

*Article by: Tribal Youth Resource Center Staff*



# Mindful Moments: Guiding Youth Who Are Justice Involved

When I think of being mindful with our youth who are justice involved, I think of a teenage female who was bouncing back and forth between her mother and father's house. They are hours apart, so switching homes meant switching schools, counselors, etc. It was a mess. She was having a hard time living with either of her parents, because they needed more resources than she needed, to be honest.



*Photos courtesy of the Choctaw JHWC Team*

One morning, she called me because she was "about to explode." I told her to wait on me at her house -- I was on my way. I picked her up and she immediately let all of her feelings fly. She was speaking so quickly, trying to get it all out as fast as possible. After listening to her, I asked if she was hungry. We went to a restaurant for a quick bite to eat. I had a busy day that day, but I let her sit with me so she could cool down. She expressed that she wanted to stay with me a bit longer. I explained that if she stayed with me, she would be put to work on her terms and conditions that she's been putting off, e.g., an essay and a cultural project. She agreed to do the work. After, I let her know it was time for me to take her back home. She nodded and thanked me for getting her out of the house. Looking back, I could have easily looked at the full schedule I had for the day and not made time for her. And she could have easily gone down a different path.

We wear so many hats -- someone to confide in, counselor, a shoulder to cry on, a break from home, etc. **Sometimes a little extra effort or a little extra time can go a long way with these kids.** Being a JHTW Coordinator is more than checking boxes of terms and conditions. Truly wanting these kids to succeed, to grow, and to learn more about their ancestors/culture is so important. Mindfulness isn't really measurable, but I promise you: these kids remember that more than they remember an essay they were forced to write. That, perhaps, is success.

Britney Bush is the Juvenile Healing to Wellness Coordinator II and following the vision of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma: Faith, Family, and Culture. She and her team have been actively serving low-risk youth, holding space and creating wellness plans, in their JHW Program. You can learn more about their eligibility and contact information by visiting: <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/jhtw/>



# Protecting Our Most Vulnerable: Unsheltered and Runaway Native Youth

Native peoples have inhabited Turtle Island for 20,000 years, and the phenomenon of unsheltered/homeless Native youth is relatively new in Native American and Alaska Native Nations/communities. Yet today, 400+ years post-colonization, Native American youth have more than double the risk of experiencing homelessness compared to other youth. Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth experience a 120% higher risk of becoming homeless after coming out to their families. To add to the risk, a person's identity can intersect with multiple demographic categories and put them at an even higher risk of homelessness. "I don't know of any tribe that has, in their native language, a word for homeless," Sami Jo Difuntorum, Executive Director of Siletz Tribal Housing Department states. Colonization and the resulting impact on cultural and societal cohesiveness has contributed to the homeless situation among Native peoples and communities.

In December 2023, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published the 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness. This report outlines the key findings of the Point-In-Time (PIT) count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) conducted in January 2023. Specifically, this report provides 2023 national, state, and Continuums of Care (CoCs)-level PIT and HIC estimates of homelessness, as well as estimates of chronically homeless persons,



homeless veterans, and homeless children and youth. The report highlights the following:

- Among all people experiencing homelessness, **4%** identified as American Indian, Alaska Native (AI/AN), or Indigenous. These individuals were nearly **twice as likely** to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness than sheltered homelessness.
- The largest percentage increase of people experiencing homelessness between 2022 and 2023 was among people who identified as AI/AN or Indigenous, which increased by **18%** (1,631 more people).
- AI/AN or Indigenous populations also showed a large percentage increase in both sheltered and unsheltered experiences of individual homelessness between 2022 and 2023, both of which rose by **18-19%** (or 2,860 people total).
- **3%** of all families with children experiencing homelessness in 2023 were AI/AN or Indigenous people.
- Unaccompanied youth who identified as AI/AN or Indigenous made up nearly twice as large of the share of youth located in unsheltered locations than sheltered locations (7% vs 4%).

- The share of unaccompanied youth who identified as AI/AN or Indigenous was highest in other largely urban CoCs (8%) and largely rural CoCs (7%) and lowest within largely suburban CoCs (2%). Native youth are disproportionately represented in homeless shelters and transitional living programs.

It has been challenging to accurately assess how many AI/AN youth are homeless due to issues such as inadequate rural outreach, government agency mistrust, and varying definitions of homelessness in tribal communities. Additionally, Native American youth experiencing homelessness may not fit the federal definition of homeless, which may further prohibit them from accessing human services.

In an effort to better understand the social and economic disparities impacting the health, wellness, and safety of Native youth and to provide pertinent resources to OJJDP Tribal Youth Program and Juvenile Healing to Wellness Court grantees, the Tribal Youth Resource Center created an Online Learning Event (OLEs) series, Protecting Our Most Vulnerable – Unsheltered and Runaway Native Youth: Part I and Part II. The OLEs focused on the needs and current service gaps of unsheltered and runaway Native youth across the country, emphasizing how unsheltered and runaway Native youth are at higher risk of becoming a victim of sex trafficking and human trafficking or becoming justice involved. The vision for the series was to provide knowledge of the issue, impacts on Native communities, and increase knowledge of prevention and

intervention strategies to reduce the occurrence of unsheltered and runaway youth in Native American and Alaska Native communities. Unlike other systems youth interact with, such as the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, efforts to serve youth experiencing homelessness are not provided through a single, coordinated system of supports funded by a state or federal agency. Moreover, the varied and unique needs of youth, particularly Native youth, who experience homelessness require a range of culturally and community-based interventions and solutions that no single funding stream can provide. Collaboration among federal, state, Tribal and local partners is a critical need to provide this full range of solutions.

Creating a path to halt the rise of unsheltered and runaway AI/AN youth will require innovation, expanded regional and national partnerships, dedicated resources to Tribal Nations, Native American and Alaska Native communities, and a deepened commitment by state and federal agencies to work towards transformation and re-orientation towards justice in the nation's major systems serving Native youth. The Tribal Youth Resource Center will continue to move forward to collect relevant data, identify resources & culturally rooted services/programs, and most importantly, engage Native youth to lend their voice and experiences to our communities to identify sustainable solutions to an issue our ancestors never could have imagined ~ *unsheltered and runaway youth.*

**Article by: Tribal Youth Resource Center Staff**



News Flash!

# Collective Wisdom: Highlights from the 2024 OJJDP Tribal Youth Program Midwest Regional



From August 13-15, 2024, the Tribal Youth Resource Center hosted the 2024 OJJDP Tribal Youth Program Midwest Regional meeting. The event took place on the traditional lands of the Dakota people at the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community-owned JW Marriott Minneapolis Mall of America, a hotel with a door directly into the Mall of America (the largest mall in the country)! Communities from the Midwest and beyond traveled to join the event from across 28 programs (including Tribal Youth Programs and Youth Healing to Wellness Courts), in addition to Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) staff, Tribal Youth Resource Center (TYRC) staff and consultants, and local Native vendors, musical artists, and community leaders. All participants came together to learn collaboratively with session facilitators, share collective wisdom, and build and strengthen connections.

Staff from the Tribal Youth Resource Center excitedly awaited participants' arrival on August 13. After attendees settled in with their cups of coffee, the event began with a traditional opening from Austin Owen (*Dakota/Hopi, Tinta Wita-Prairie Island Dakota Community*), followed by a meaningful opening from OJJDP staff Leanetta Jessie (Deputy Associate Administrator) and Jazmone Wilkerson (Program Manager), Youth Justice and System Innovation Division, and words of encouragement from Sydney Matheson (*Colville Confederated Tribes*), Young Leader Mentor at the Tribal Youth Resource Center.

## Check Out Our Links!

Click on the links embedded in this article to view PPTs from the Regional and more! All resources from the Regional are also linked on the page following the article.





Sydney Matheson was one of four TYRC Young Leaders in attendance, along with Anagali (Shace) Duncan (*Keetoowah, Muskogee Creek, Seneca*), Isabella Fridia (*Wichita, Kiowa, Caddo, Hunka Oglala Lakota*), and Sam Schimmel (*Kenaitze Indian and Siberian Yupik Eskimo*). The TYRC Young Leaders contributed immensely to the event; they designed and facilitated a session, "The Importance of Culture in Uplifting Indigenous Youth," served as panelists in "A Discussion Panel on Authentically Partnering with Indigenous Youth," offered words of wisdom during openings/closings, and supported with energizer activities. Attendees deeply appreciated their collective efforts, thoughtful reflections and suggestions, and openness. One attendee noted after the session, "I loved hearing from the youth themselves how they have learned to live and not just survive!" The beauty and impact of this sentiment was celebrated during a performance of his song, "Red Power," which Austin Owen shared with attendees to welcome them back from lunch on day one.

The agenda also included three impactful presentations on mentoring programs proving effective with Native youth: Friends of the Children Mentoring Program, facilitated by Tasha Mousseau, Chief Officer of Advancement and Tribal Relations at Friends of the Children, After School Native Mentoring Program, facilitated by Jeri Brunoe, Brunoe Consulting, and 7th Generation Mentoring Model, facilitated by Jeri



**"I loved hearing from the youth themselves how they have learned to live and not just survive!"**

**-Regional Participant**



Brunoe and Stephanie Autumn, Director, Tribal Youth Resource Center. Each session offered participants a unique, culturally grounded mentoring approach, resources to support implementation, and activities to bring participants together through creativity and reflection. Illustrative of the hands-on approach of the sessions was one activity during the 7th Generation Mentoring Model, when participants were asked to "build their vision for a mentoring model" with their table group, using materials such as Legos, gummy bears, and pipe cleaners. The results of the activity included many highly creative models, meaningful discussion, and a lot of laughter. As Jordan Gibson, TYRC Training and Technical Assistance Specialist shared in his blog post reflection on the event, "A Reflection on Mentoring and Mentoring Programs from the TYRC Midwest Regional," "mentoring programs are about fostering connections, sharing knowledge, and supporting each other as we navigate both traditional and modern challenges.

The resources and approaches from the mentor programs we discussed reinforce the idea that mentoring is a powerful tool for shaping the future while honoring our past." Another presentation, "Promoting Trust and Respect for Our Youth: The TYRC Inherited Magazine," facilitated by TYRC Consultant Joe CrowShoe and TYRC Events and Communications Coordinator Hannah Ellman on learnings from a new TYRC publication, emphasized this very concept – the positive impact of incorporating youth voice through connection-building into all phases of program planning and implementation.

Integral to the success of the event was the presence and participation of four OJJDP staff across sessions, conversations, and activities, and presentations from Leanetta Jessie (Deputy Associate Administrator) and Jazmone Wilkerson (Program Manager), Youth Justice and System Innovation Division. Leanetta and Jazmone offered attendees the opportunity to join in a transparent conversation around Performance Measures, resulting in meaningful and supportive discussion for all. Leanetta and Jazmone also joined participants and TYRC staff on a visit to the Dakota sacred site, Bdote, at the end of the first day. Mat Pendleton (*Dakota - Cansa'yapi/Lower Sioux Indian Community*) provided tobacco to participants for an offering and shared the history of Bdote. Led by Mat, 19 individuals who joined the excursion walked together to the sacred site.

The walk provided folks the opportunity to connect across Tribes and programs, while honoring and showing respect to the Dakota people.

The final day of the event was centered on Indigenous Community Cafés, giving attendees the opportunity to discuss topics such as academic success, cultural integration, serving our most vulnerable youth, and behavioral health/healing pathways. Attendees came together in two groups to share collective wisdom on these topics, offer support, and learn from one another in community. The event closed with all attendees joined together in a circle for three beautiful songs from the Bdote Singers, an Ojibwe and Dakota Drum Group, and closing words from Juanita G Corbine Espinosa, Wisdom Keeper (*Dakota, Spirit Lake*).

The Tribal Youth Resource Center is deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to share space with all attendees of the event, a group of inspiring individuals who are committed to serving their communities with effective, culturally grounded ways. Thank you to all participants, facilitators, staff, vendors, artists, and leaders for your time, wisdom, and helpful feedback. We look forward to the next time we can all come together in service of our youth!

Article by: Tribal Youth Resource Center staff.  
A special thank you to Zachariah Booth (Kanaka Maoli) from [Ike Maka photography](#) for sharing your talents with us as the event photographer and for many of the beautiful photographs that accompany this piece!





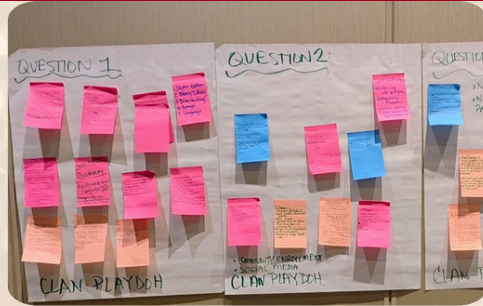
# Moments of Togetherness

## 2024 OJDP Tribal Youth Program Regional

1. Themes / Takeaways / Learnings  
Build up culture & manifest within it.

2. Strengths & Areas of Growth  
Be true to yourself, lead by example & proudly represent your culture

3. Imagine: Next Steps  
Strive to live & thrive building positive energy for sustainability & success





## Interested in providing programs and support for Native Youth?

The Tribal Youth Resource Center has a team of professionals that can assist with training, resources, and community partner identification that can support system change and improvement—just reach out to us at [TribalYouth@TLPI.org](mailto:TribalYouth@TLPI.org) or fill out a training request on the Tribal Youth Resource Center website: [TribalYouth.org](http://TribalYouth.org).

**The Tribal Youth Resource Center Quarterly Newsletter is a resource for all OJJDP funded tribal grantees and other interested communities.**

**For ongoing news, events, resources you can subscribe to the Tribal Youth Resource Center E-Weekly distribution list by clicking on the link below.**

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