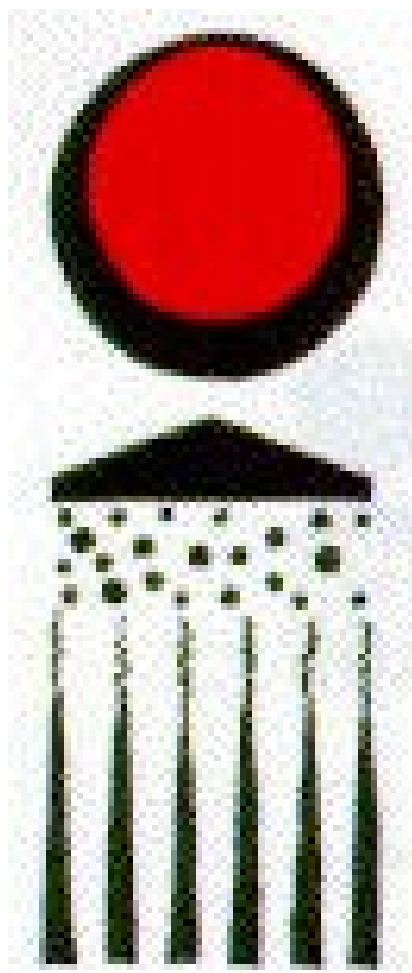


Seattle Indian Health Board

Seattle, Washington



Healthy Nations Program

December 1993 – June 2000

“A Variety of Indian Programs Spawned in Urban Communities: From Marches, Computers, and Drama”

Seattle Indian Health Board Narrative

Historical Context:

The Healthy Nations Initiative in the Seattle/Greater King County area of Washington State was originally given to a partnership of two of the larger Indian representative groups—the Seattle Indian Health Board (SIHB) and the United Indians of All Tribes Foundation (UIATF). The SIHB was the recipient of record. This partnership was formally constructed as a cooperative organization in response to the Request for Proposal for the Healthy Nations Initiative of Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Such a shared arrangement had been suggested by the Healthy Nations National Program Office (NPO) and the National Advisory Committee (NAC). Both organizations had a long history of positive association and relationship in the American Indian communities in Greater King County. Although historically both agencies had worked together in the community, this focused formalization added a level of challenge.

Seattle is home to some 7,300 American Indians and Native Alaskans within a metropolitan area of one-half million citizens. There are no distinct Indian neighborhoods or geographical areas specifically identified as Native. Greater King County includes at least one-fifth of the total American Indian/Native Alaskan population in the State of Washington. Some 20,000 Native residents, among the 1.5 million general population, live within the 90-minute corridor of Seattle. Comprised of members of 252 different tribes from across the United

States, this catchment region is quite diverse and rich, yet it lacks defined cultural structures and regions.

The Seattle Indian Health Board is a multipurpose community health center that was incorporated in 1970. It is a nonprofit center for medical, dental, mental health, chemical dependency, and community prevention education services. Their mission is to raise, to the highest level possible, the physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and social health of American Indians and Alaska Natives. This is a very comprehensive off-reservation primary care agency with over 150 staff operating at two sites, including an inpatient residential chemical dependency treatment center and a satellite treatment center near Seattle. It provides high-quality care and is accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations.

The United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, also formed in 1970, is a private, nonprofit corporation, employing over 100 staff comprised of local tribal leaders and professionals. A majority of the staff is Native American. UIATF is a community and social services-based organization focusing on promoting cultural awareness, social and economic reform, and educational opportunity. It seeks to promote Indian heritage and culture; its goal is to foster and sustain a strong sense of identity and tradition among the Indian people of Seattle. UIATF seeks opportunities to enhance and expand positive change in Native communities, moving toward greater self-sufficiency for Native people.

Well-researched data indicated that a majority of the American Indian/Native Alaskan families in the Greater King County area had been

personally affected by alcohol and substance abuse. Other social indicators showed that American Indian youth in the region faced greater economic challenges, dropped out of school more often, had more accidents, and were more likely to end up in the criminal justice system than their counterpart non-Native peers. Gang violence, drug trafficking, and poverty were disproportionately exhibited.

Phase I:

The successful proposal—The Seattle Healthy Nations: Reducing Substance Abuse among Native Americans—was composed and submitted to RWJF. Following a national search, a director for Phase I was selected from within the UIATF existing staff. The director position was then located in the SIHB administrative structure. The director was to organize and coordinate the Seattle Healthy Nation project and objectives. The central objective of Healthy Nations was the expansion of community outreach programs and services. The identified attitude was one of joining and supporting the community committees and activities that were already established throughout the city.

The selected target populations of the Seattle Healthy Nations were children, adolescents, and their families. Both the public awareness and intervention/aftercare components begun in Phase I addressed this population. The Healthy Nations partnership envisioned UIATF addressing public awareness and community-wide prevention while SIHB focused on the treatment-related components, including early identification, intervention, and aftercare. Such a

natural alignment of each agency's historical strengths and connections within the community seemed logical and efficient.

The first eighteen months were spent primarily conducting focus groups with key stakeholders and agencies representing the diverse and wide range of American Indian culture, concerns, and needs. The Seattle Healthy Nations hoped to bring together a majority of the different tribal members and other community agencies to discuss strategies for addressing substance abuse issues. The agenda aimed to raise awareness of services to help prevent and intervene earlier with substance-related problems. Many of the activities undertaken as part of the four components of Healthy Nations targeted enhancing established efforts and programs. These activities were based on the philosophy of an activity-based versus an educational prevention and support model.

Many meetings and attempts to bring the diverse community committees together under the rubric of a Healthy Nations advisory committee exposed the differences between the two recipient agencies. The Healthy Nations goal of community-wide integration and coordination of successful programs became more obscured due to increased attention toward dissipating the growing tensions in the shared administration of the program. A leadership collapse was precipitated by the pressure of negotiating two different corporate dynamics. Dealing with community-perceived expectations of the project named "Healthy Nations" added to this internal stress. Many community members thought that

Healthy Nations would address all social and medical needs and would bridge all disparities.

Eighteen months into Phase I, the first Healthy Nations director vacated his position. This departure at such a critical time left a void in an essential position and demanded quick action. The situation forced recognition of and negotiations regarding the different governmental structures and fiduciary responsibilities between these two fine agencies. The outgrowth of resulting discussions was the hiring of an SIHB Community Outreach supervisor as the new HNI director, who was hired and introduced during an NPO site visit. Fortunately, the new director had some knowledge of Healthy Nations and had worked in the community prior to this advancement.

The NPO and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation representatives strongly encouraged the new director and the SIHB to fulfill the original proposal objectives. This call for action on Phase I was complicated by the fact that the Phase II implementation proposal was quickly coming due. The director scrambled to respond to the requirements of the grant, build on the Phase I work, and follow the recommendations of the Healthy Nations Advisory Board, NPO, and SIHB.

Transition:

Four iterations of the Seattle Phase II proposals were submitted. The first three were rejected due to concerns over too much emphasis on the Spiritwalk—a community-wide event that promoted Indian Heritage—and the activity-based

prevention model. Adding to the NPO/grantee stress was a growing concern among the NPO and the NAC about the viability of the partnership between the Seattle Indian Health Board and the United Indians of All Tribes Foundation. Upon further discussion, consultation, and review, the NPO decided that they would prefer a single-source provider in the greater King County area. The Seattle Indian Health Board was chosen to be the sole administrative agency during the Phase II implementation. The dissolution of the partnership left some staff and associates sour and angry; others were liberated and accepting. Shadows of this transition play in the background of Healthy Nations activities throughout the implementation period.

Phase II:

Phase I had concentrated on building liaisons with different community agencies, prompting transformation of the program assistant position into a volunteer coordinator. Healthy Nations also struggled to fulfill the complex paperwork requirements of the grant. Reporting the activities was less than straightforward and a low priority in the face of overwhelming requests and personnel issue. The hiring of an adult activity coordinator complemented that of the director, youth activity coordinator, and volunteer coordinator. In principle, this alleviated some strain, but personnel struggles due to sickness, schooling, and time demands still managed to plague the early years. Inroads into strong community agencies like the Indian Heritage School, Microsoft, Computer Technology Center, and others took constant nurturing and negotiation. The

Spiritwalk continued to demand attention, resources, and oversight, a fact that remained a point of contention between the SIHB and the NPO.

Human resources were stretched thin; even losses of associates caused delays in program growth. The death of the principal of the Heritage School was particularly difficult, a loss which was felt during the remaining Healthy Nation years. Early Phase II was challenging and rocky.

As the HNI program gained entrance and support from the established Native community groups—its effectiveness and successes more widely known—the relationship between the NPO and Seattle Healthy Nations exhibited more flexibility and coordination. The pressure from the early days lessened, and community expectations to be the “end all of health” were diminished by public awareness efforts to disseminate the Healthy Nations mission. The relationship with the NPO improved by demonstrated successes and thus liberated the program director to respond more freely to community suggestions and needs. The director matured into his role leading a very dedicated staff through personal example, hard work, and advocacy.

Seattle Healthy Nations supported and sponsored numerous and diverse drug-abuse-prevention and health-related activities. Some were successful; some were not. Some were supported with time and energy; others with money and goods. The idea was to have a presence in the communities and encourage individuals and groups to join any effort to stop the damage of substance abuse. The attitude was to respond to viable ideas and offer support to both individuals and agencies in their efforts. Healthy Nations worked hand-in-hand with the

American Indian Heritage School and the Seattle Indian Health Consortium. They worked alongside different public and private agencies such as the police department, other treatment providers, and cultural groups to provide educational and recreational activities for young American Indians/Alaskan Natives. A philosophy of invitation and non-exclusion with direct and clearly stated rules about drug use during any Healthy Nations activity underscored the public appeal and success.

Phase II implementation experienced its portion of struggle. The director was an extremely dedicated person who, along with the activity coordinators, would work 70 to 75 hours a week (almost to the point of exhaustion) out of a deep sense of duty to Healthy Nations' values, individuals, and programs. They cooked for the meetings, transported kids to different activities, organized recreational events, and taught classes at the Computer Technology Center. The staff, in concert with Microsoft support, organized a computer mentorship with Native American employees of Microsoft for at-risk American Indian youth. They coordinated the public service announcements, advertised for the Spiritwalk, and supervised the volunteers who were running cultural activities. The mentoring programs expanded during the third year to include the Boeing Native Flight program, offering the opportunity to connect Native kids with Native professionals from Boeing. Such programs provided an avenue to reach the goal of creating career and professional opportunities within the American Indian community. The Microsoft mentoring program, Microsoft's Powwow, Boeing's Native Flight program, and individual placements of kids with mentors realized

and confirmed the philosophy of active prevention. Scores of youth found alternatives to using drugs and self-destructive behaviors. Traditional respect and relationships were fostered.

The complex nature of focusing on individuals and small groups throughout the diversely cultural Seattle communities proved challenging and instructive. As the community voice was heard and supported, the concept of a central community advisory committee gave way to more natural and specific sources of direction. Each community group became a coordinating council for their individual programs. Mobilization of the Healthy Nations resources reflected the larger community through listening to and sustaining existent infrastructures. It was from these adjustments that Seattle Healthy Nations realized its initial hope of coordinating existing community resources. To allow each of the individual participants and groups to be the defining source of “culture” was insightful and productive. The inclusive attitude and flexible resource management allowed responses to requests that seemed viable and preventive in nature. In fact, the director was told by one of his staff: “the thing that makes Healthy Nations successful is that before Healthy Nations, no one would have thought that all of these weird people would be in the same room.” This statement was in reference to the number of community participants there—from the University of Washington academics, researchers, police officers, health providers, gang leaders, youth participants, families, and elders—talking about how best to help kids and families get away from substance abuse. The initial objective of Seattle Healthy Nations of supporting culture in its diversity and

diffusion in King County became its hallmark and legacy—cooperation through respectful listening, hard work, and individual focus.

Highlights:

A gathering of American Indian and Native Alaskans from the Greater Seattle area—the Spiritwalk—experienced unprecedented expansion. Tribal members walked through the city in celebration of their culture and heritage and out of respect for those who had gone before. The Spiritwalk’s success demanded more volunteers, more support, and more oversight by Healthy Nations staff. The NPO believed that too much emphasis was being put on the Spiritwalk at the expense of the other Healthy Nations components. The director strongly argued that the Spiritwalk was their gateway to wide public awareness and that it provided a common ground with the cultural diversity of Seattle. He posited that it represented the greatest collective opportunity to fulfill the mission of Healthy Nations by providing the best means for getting their positive sobriety and cultural pride messages on the street and into the communities. This point of negotiation remained active throughout the grant cycle. The Spiritwalk continued as a central component and legacy of the Seattle Healthy Nations program.

An attitude of inclusion and response to the wants and interests of youth instead of imposing prescribed activities on them helped to create an outgrowth program, “Red Eagle Soaring.” Red Eagle Soaring is a theatre group that utilizes Native storytelling and acting to share stories about positive American Indian role models, Native lifestyles, cultural heritage inclusion, and anti-drug and -alcohol

messages. This little troop of thespians performed in schools, at community events, and at Native gatherings, including other Healthy Nations grantee sites. Healthy Nations sponsored performances; provided transportation, advertisement, props, and rehearsal lunches; and occasionally supplied pizza after evening events. The effectiveness of Red Eagle Soaring is demonstrated in a vignette of a young Native woman teetering on the edge of self-destruction due to substance abuse. Her natural talent and love of acting drew her to participate in Red Eagle Soaring, and she soon dedicated herself to the pursuit of her talent and love. The messages of hope, pride, and sobriety found their place in her. A year after the end of Healthy Nations, she met the ex-director at a municipal function and reported being the executive producer of a play getting rave reviews throughout the Greater Seattle area.

Although there was competition and some duplication with other community agencies, Seattle Healthy Nations became a resource support for multiple in-school curriculum and cultural activities. Maturation of the Seattle Healthy Nations program confirmed the philosophy of active prevention. The activities themselves were not the end goal. Numbering the events or counting the participants gave way to focusing on individual kids. Not all attempts to accommodate requests from the community or target staff identified needs or met with success. One such program—Open Gym Night, an idea for late-night activities—floundered and eventually closed. This attempt to provide healthy alternatives to youth prone to wandering the streets or participating in gang activities proved dangerous and ill conceived. Lacking sufficient supervision and

security, the late-night-activity idea exacerbated the worries of the director. Inadequate community resources together with insufficient collaboration hastened the demise of this activity. The staff learned and refocused energies into different and more successful after-school programming.

The Microsoft mentoring program placed youth in contact with successful Native mentors working at Microsoft. A successful project, it fulfilled part of the vision of Healthy Nations. As an activity that taught marketable skills as well as bridged generational lines, the Microsoft mentoring program was without peer. Scores of American Indian youth and their families were given the opportunity to associate with the most successful corporation in the Northwest. This program not only served to broaden Native community interaction but also helped to counter alienation of youth from adults and to provide alternatives to negative lifestyles. It was so successful and respected that Microsoft allowed a Pow Wow to be held on their campus; one year, over 500 people attended. Healthy Nations provided food, gifts, entertainment, and transportation for participants. Such success encouraged the establishment of other mentoring programs such as the Boeing Native Flight Club. Engendering cultural pride and identity through association with modern professionals and business people served to give healthy options, hope, and meaningful skills to those youth and adults involved. Pride in their heritage and the invitation to give back to their communities proved to be an outgrowth of these mentoring experiences.

Another successful program was “Summers Options.” This alternative activities program targeted the boredom youth experienced during long summer

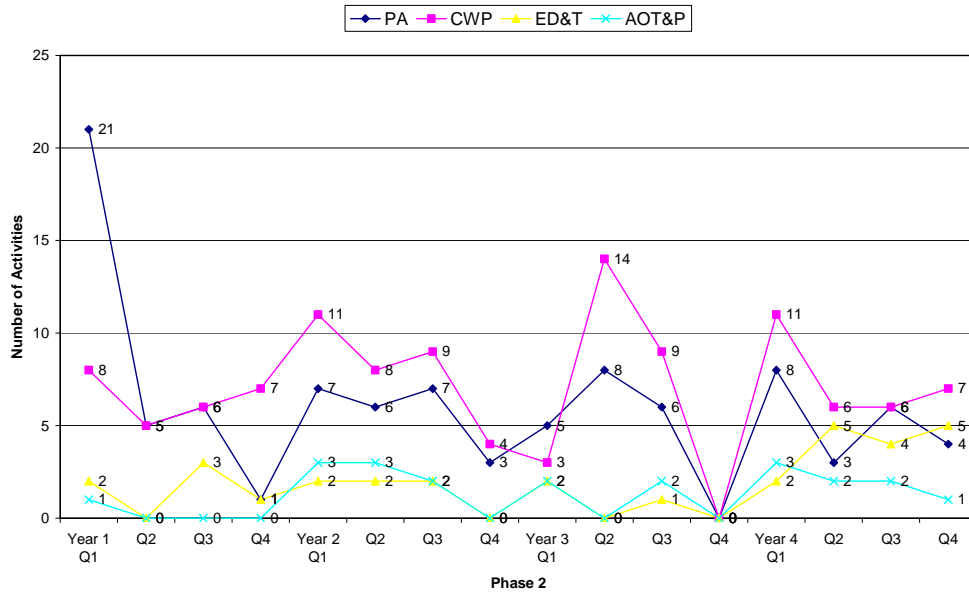
days. The Options program succeeded in creating an atmosphere of pride and hope for many young people through exposure to culturally relevant experiences. The Options program was co-located with the SIHB treatment programs, thus offering a controlled and supervised environment. This program placed referred youth in contact with recovery, culture, and caring adults. It proved inviting and effective. One story illustrates the individual focus and human success of the Options program. A very large, 15-year-old gang-want-to-be started coming to the Summer Options program. He exhibited the “angry-at-the-world” attitude and bravado generally associated with gang membership. As a mixed American Indian and African American, he had significant racial identity confusion. He posed a daunting challenge for early intervention and prevention objectives. The Healthy Nations staff kept inviting him, including him, and reaching out to him. He learned how to bead and participated consistently, although not always fully. Through a positive relationship with Healthy Nations staff members and a growing sense of personal accomplishment, this young man’s attitude and demeanor changed—an angry boy designed and beaded a sense of belonging. After a few months, he proudly announced to the staff that he had finally learned how to do something, and he remained in the program for about 2 ½ years. Today, this young man is productive in the community, has given up his gang affiliation, is gainfully employed, and has established a connection to his cultural roots. Here the measure of success is an individual life and future. His story reflects the vision of the Seattle Healthy Nations program and staff.

A poignant and conclusive story about the efforts of Seattle Healthy Nations and the impact of community partnering concerns a homeless couple. It was reported that a homeless couple raised \$100 by gathering cans and other sellable items and donated it to the Spiritwalk. They felt compelled to help continue this great representation of American Indian spirit and the good work of Healthy Nations. Its message is unwavering about wellness and sober pride.

Red Eagle Soaring has community sponsors. The cultural aftercare component, the Options Program, is now a permanent part of the treatment curriculum. Prevention awareness and strength through coordination has continued in the philosophies of other agencies. Community collaboration was solidified notwithstanding the early tensions. Many individuals were helped and continue to give back to their communities and their people. Some youth were guided to career paths; other participants have gone on to university studies when otherwise they might have lost their way.

Staff matured, grew, and expanded their skills and connections to the community sources of power and change. Even where a community was undefined, there is a core—a voice that needed to be heard and supported. Healthy Nations learned to hear these voices. These Healthy Nation staff now represent, in different agencies and different communities, the same ideals, respect, and ethic provided by association with this unique grant.

Seattle Indian Health Board Activities



Key: PA = public awareness
 CWP = community-wide prevention
 ED&T = early identification and treatment
 AOT&P = accessible options for treatment and relapse prevention

