

# Building Trust in Linkages: Trauma Informed Practice with Tribal Families



PRESENTED BY RAQUEL MORRIS, LCSW

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# Acknowledgements

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- ❖ Land Acknowledgement and 4 Directions
- ❖ Creator, Ancestors, All my relatives and all my relations (acknowledges the interconnection between all of us).
- ❖ With power, comes responsibility.
- ❖ This is dedicated to my Grandma and Grandpa Robinson, my Uncle Greg Robinson, my Grandma Irene, and my Indigenous great-grandmothers Elizabeth Nichols, Aurora, and Sityaka Solis (People of the Sun).



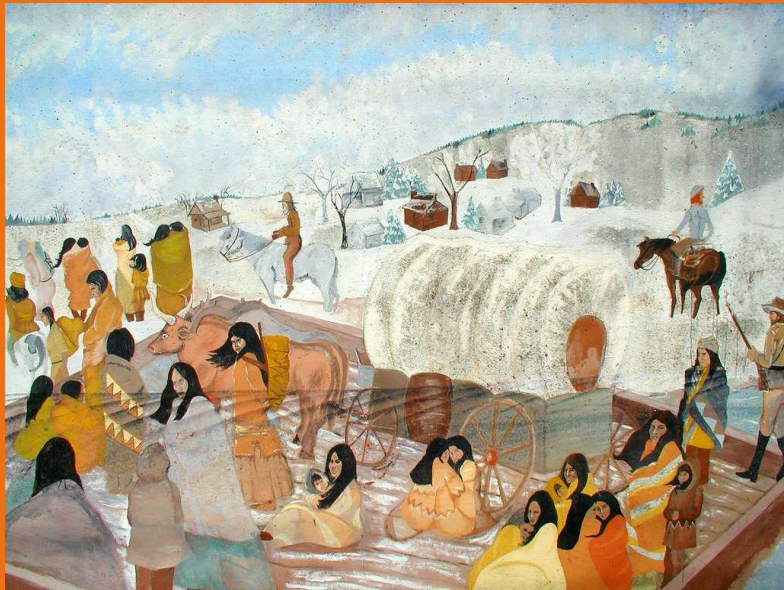
There is no separation. We are all from the same place. As long as there is respect and acknowledgement of connections, things continue working. When that stops we all die.

— *Joy Harjo* —

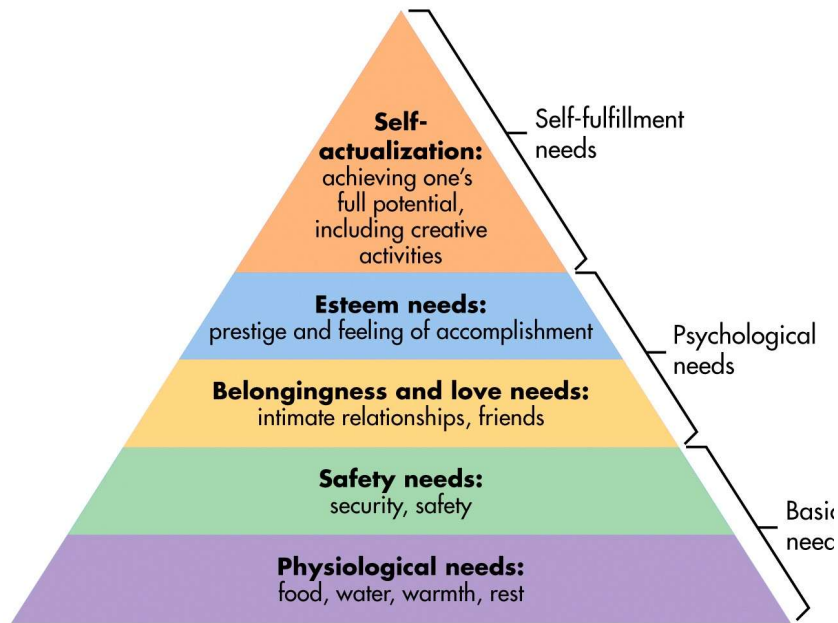
**AZ QUOTES**

# Historical Oppression

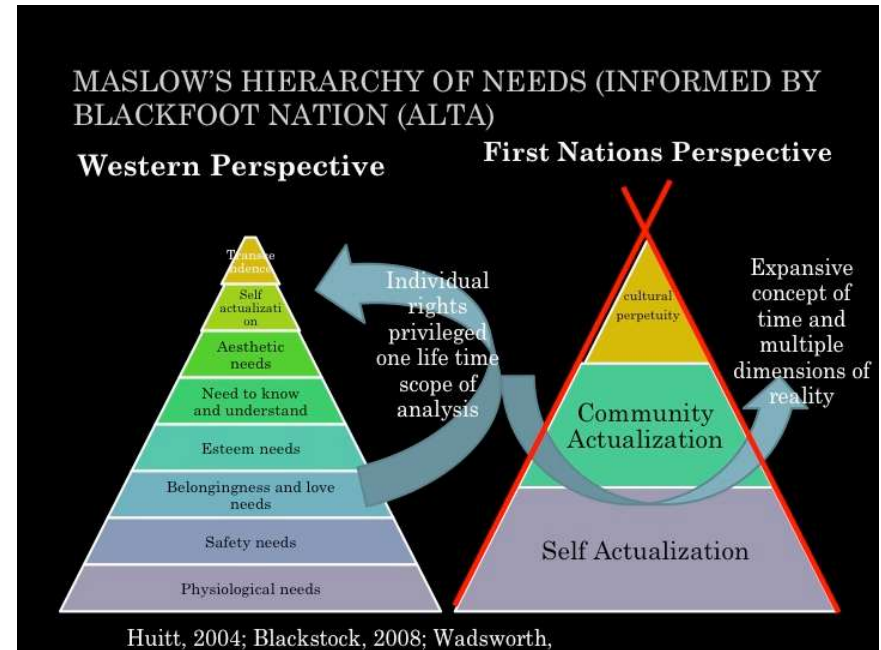
- 1) Residential Schools
- 2) Child Welfare: The Sixties Scoop
- 3) Eradication of Culture and Community
- 4) Land Displacement



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## Maslow's Hierarchy & Siksika (Blackfoot Tribe) Perspective

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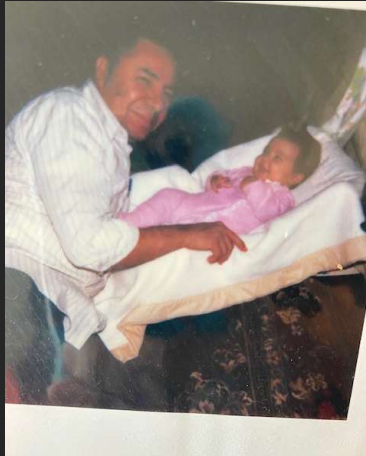
# Residential Schools: My Grandfather

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❖ "Indian School": 139

Residential Schools in Canada and there were more than 526 Government funded/church ran schools in US (number as of February 2025).

❖ Shockingly, there are still 125 "Indian Boarding Schools" open today. [Boardingschoolhealing.org]



# Film: Residential Schools

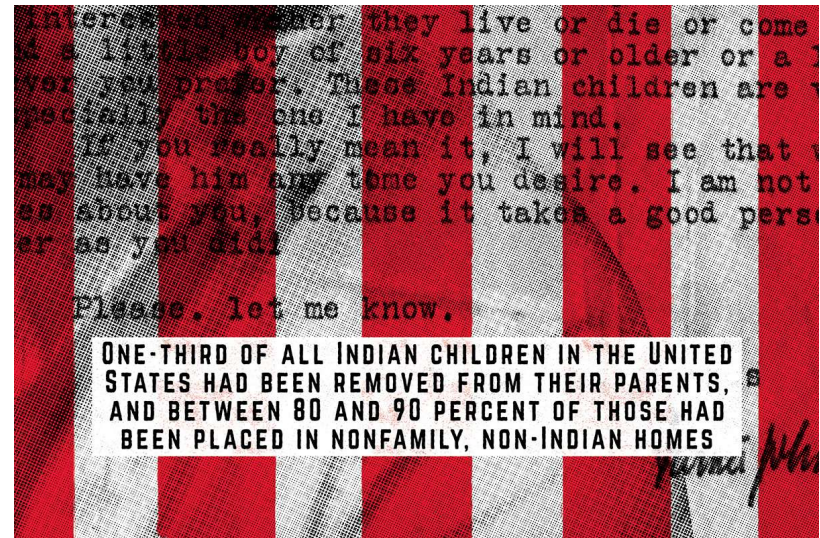
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# Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978

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❖ In recognition of the State of California's legal obligation and the mandate to improve statewide Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and California's ICWA (CAL-ICWA) implementation and to address the well-being of Indian children and families and reduce the disproportionality of Indian children in California's child welfare system,



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Rising Up:  
Truth &  
Reconciliation

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# Native American Child Welfare Disparity

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- ❖ California's Child Welfare-involved families are disproportionately Black, Native American, and low income.
- ❖ Native American children are placed into foster care at 4x the rate as Caucasian children.
  - ❖ **Next Steps:** Understanding which California communities are disproportionately represented and the reasons why, to help Legislation consider policy interventions that may be most effective at address the disparities.
  - ❖ **Research:** A couple California Counties with disproportionate rates are Humboldt County and Los Angeles County. 42% of Humboldt County's child welfare court cases involved AIAN children despite them only being 6-12% of the population. A 2019 NIH study found disparity in decision making in Los Angeles County



# ICWA 2050

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## Funding

Increase funding and support for Tribes directly so they can provide a full range of child welfare services to their children and families.

## Collaboration

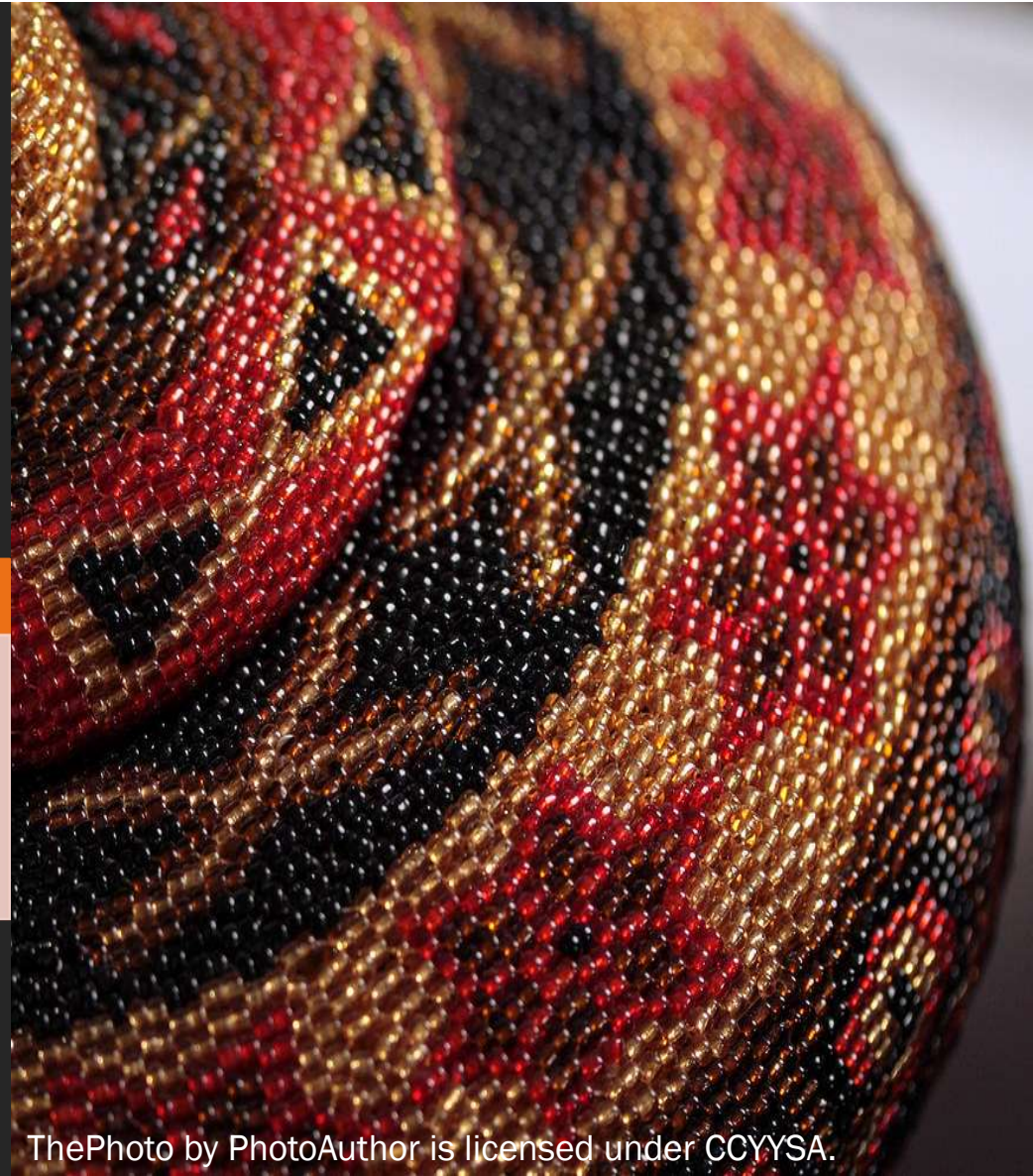
Establish a strong collaboration between tribes and states to work together to implement ICWA.

## Monitoring

Establish a federal-tribal relationship that rigorously monitors and supports ICWA.

## Awareness

Increase public awareness about ICWA.



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# Family Spirit Curriculum

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# Collaboration:Core Practice Model

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- ❖ Prevention
- ❖ Engagement
- ❖ Inquiry and Exploration
- ❖ Teaming
- ❖ Advocacy
- ❖ Accountability

# Indigenous Youth Mental Health

*Mental and Behavioral Health - The Office of Minority Health. (2025). <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov>*

- ❖ In 2021, adolescent American Indian/Alaska Native females, ages 15-19, had a death rate that was 5x higher than non-Hispanic white females in the same age group.
- ❖ In 2018, American Indian/Alaska Native males, ages 15-24, had a death rate that was twice that of non-Hispanic white males in the same age group.
- ❖ In 2019, suicide was the second leading cause of death for American Indian/Alaska Natives between the ages of 10 and 34.



A black and white photograph of a large group of Native American children sitting in front of a residential school building. The children are arranged in many rows, filling the foreground and middle ground. The building in the background is a long, two-story structure with many windows and doors. The overall tone is somber and historical.

# Discussion:

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How do you think Residential Schools and Child Welfare history impacted the Native American community when looking at child development, family, identity, and cultural connection? How do you think this history impacts the relationship systems have with Indigenous clients/families?

## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

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- In NIHB published the largest study of ACES for AIAN populations to date by Giano et al (2021) <https://legacy.nihb.org/aces-resource-basket/>
- Average ACE score for AIAN which is 50% higher than white individuals and 40% higher than Black and Hispanic individuals.
- ACE scores were higher for females than males. LGBTQ+ Natives had a significantly high ACE score of 4.05.



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# Prop. 1 and Native Americans

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- In 2019, one-third of the nation's total homeless population lived in California, and 4.5% of this population was AIAN (Henry et al., 2020) which is disproportionately high considering the population of AIAN.
- Substance-related poisonings and overdose deaths have increased among American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN) [1]. AIANs had the highest substance related deaths between 2013–2017, compared with other U.S. racial/ethnic groups.
- Marked disparities, social injustices, historical oppression, and multiple risk factors influence the high prevalence rates of homelessness and SUD in AIAN communities (Skewes & Blume, 2019).
- **Protective factors associated with better outcomes are: cultural connectedness, traditional spirituality, family connectedness, and supportive community environment.**

[Soto C, West AE, Ramos GG, Unger JB. Substance and Behavioral Addictions among American Indian and Alaska Native Populations. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2022 Mar 3;19(5):2974. doi: 10.3390/ijerph19052974. PMID: 35270667; PMCID: PMC8910676.]

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# Cultural Rituals for Substance Use Treatment

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- Half of Native Americans in substance use treatment drop out after 1 session.
- Dr. Joseph Gone has found that Indigenous spiritual practices can help Native Americans heal from centuries of subjugation and abuse through teaching them to live in right relation through community connection. Culture is medicine.
- <https://www.apa.org/members/content/native-american-culture>



# Stigma in Indigenous Communities

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- ❖ American Indian physician and clinical psychologist Dr. Mehl-Madrona: “All illness is an illness of the spirit that manifests itself in the body, mind, and emotions”.



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# Cultural Beliefs and Practices:

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- ❖ Connection to Land/Kinship/Animism
- ❖ Ancestral Connection, Spiritual beliefs, living in Right Relation
- ❖ 4 Directions, Medicine Wheel
- ❖ Ceremony and cultural rituals such as smudging.

❖ [<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/exhibition/healing-ways/medicine-ways/introduction.html>]

# Motivational Interviewing in Native American Communities

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- ❖ Way of Being with client, value client's knowledge and expertise vs expert role.
- ❖ Client resolves ambivalence, not the clinician and things are done in collaboration.
- ❖ Elicited from client, not imposed by the clinician or system.
- ❖ Gentle, trauma informed approach to therapy; give client choice and allow for silence.
- ❖ Encouraging autonomy rather than taking authoritative role.
- ❖ OARS: Open ended questions, Affirmations, Reflections, Summaries.
- ❖ [https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Final-Resource-Guide-082213-CS\\_CO.pdf](https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Final-Resource-Guide-082213-CS_CO.pdf)





# Medicine Wheel

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- ❖ Honoring Mind, Body, Emotions, and Spirit.
  - ❖ Body: Earth. Nourish physical body, exercise, play, dance.
  - ❖ Mind: Air. Gratitude, positive thinking, acknowledging strengths, using humor, learning, storytelling.
  - ❖ Emotions: Water. Acknowledge feelings, express emotions through art/movement/singing, stuck negative emotions create illness so release emotions.
  - ❖ Spirit: Fire. Prayer, connect with land, explore connection to Spirit/faith, feed your Spirit.
- ❖ <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/exhibition/healing-ways/medicine-ways/medicine-wheel.html>

# Heritage as Healing

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# Clinical Best Practice

- ❖ Be reflective and aware of our biases in mental health treatment and in our work with clients.
- ❖ Genuinely build trust and safety with people from Indigenous communities.
- ❖ Motivational Interviewing in Native Communities
- ❖ Integrate and validate cultural practices such as medicine wheel or ceremonies as medicine.



# Improving as Systems

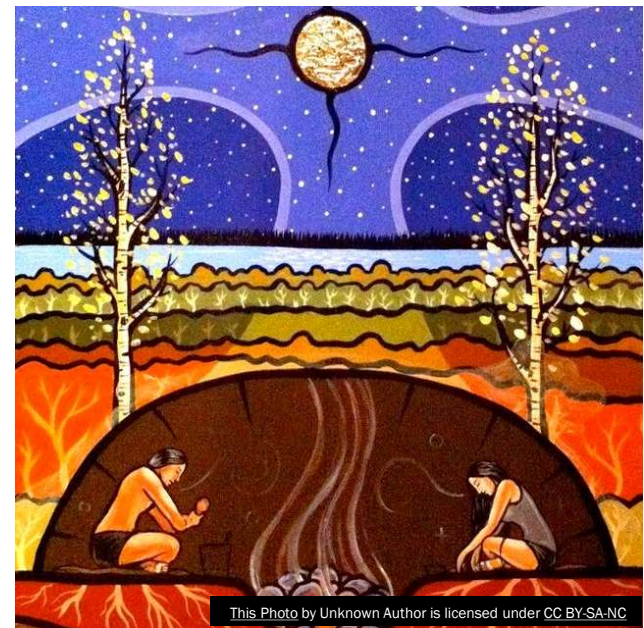
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Get to know local Tribes, Tribal leaders, healers, Tribal/Indian Health Centers across the state.

More collaboration and build relationships with Tribes and Indigenous practitioners/health centers.

Make Indigenous Communities visible and validate the value of the knowledge/medicines.

Integrate Indigenous communities, treatments, and wisdom. Create greater sense of safety and acknowledgement.





# Reflection

❖ How will today's information impact your clinical work with the Native American Community?