SPIRIT:
Supporting, Protection, Integration, and Resources in Tribes

A Research-to Practice Fellowship Project
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Center for Victim Research

The [Center for Victim Research](#) (CVR) is a one-stop resource center for victim service providers and researchers to connect and share knowledge. Its goals are to increase 1) access to victim research and data and 2) the utility of research and data collection to crime victim services nationwide. CVR's vision is to foster a community of victim service providers and researchers who routinely collaborate to improve practice through effective use of research and data.

Accordingly, CVR engages in a number of training and technical assistance activities to support victim research-and-practice collaborations. Specifically, CVR:

- Hosts a library of open-access and subscription-based victim research;
- Provides light-touch research-focused technical assistance to victim service providers;
- Translates research findings for the field in fact sheets, reports, and webinars; and
- Highlights useful research-and-practice tools and training resources for the field.

CVR also supports two types of [researcher-practitioner collaborations](#): interagency VOCA-SAC partnerships and local-level Research-and-Practice (R/P) Fellowships. In 2018, CVR's R/P Fellowship program supported nine teams of researchers and practitioners engaging in a variety of victim-focused research projects. Fellows were engaged in emerging, ongoing, or advanced research-and-practice partnerships. This report describes activities by one of CVR's 2018 R/P Fellowship teams.

R2P Fellows: Organizational Descriptions

SPIRIT (Supporting Protection, Integration, and Resources In Tribes) is a partnership between Youth Heartline, a Taos, New Mexico-based child advocacy and victim services non-profit led by Mr. Po Chen, and Sage Consulting, a firm specializing in participatory methods, action research, and evaluation with vulnerable populations, led by Dr. Holly Scheib.

Youth Heartline improves the lives of vulnerable children and their families in the Eighth Judicial District of New Mexico, with more than 25 years of experience providing advocacy to victims of child abuse and neglect in government child welfare systems. Sage Consulting builds data systems, research skills, and program capacity with vulnerable, victimized, and displaced communities around the world.

SPIRIT reflects the mutual interests of the principals in addressing research and practice gaps in the areas of child abuse and neglect, specifically in the context of Native American tribes. SPIRIT seeks to be a leader in cooperative interventions that can be applied in communities around the country.

Description of the Problem

United States American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) tribal communities experience physical, economic, social, and institutional harms at a disproportionately high rate compared to the general U.S. population. AI/AN children and youth are overrepresented in state-administered foster care and have elevated, increasing rates of victimization compared to other sub-populations.[1] AI/AN individuals have a comparatively high risk of death due to addiction, suicide, liver disease, and cirrhosis-related illness and experience mortality and morbidity from these harms at younger ages.[2] The early age onset of these illnesses and their association with household socio-economic challenges suggest the need for early, proactive intervention within AI/AN youth and family systems.[3]

Successful interventions are difficult to achieve within AI/AN communities. One issue is the lack of data concerning AI/AN children. Underreporting of abuse and neglect is common,[4] and a range of structural challenges, federal and state policy, and the complicated history of Native communities with external systems limit the communication of data necessary for program development and implementation.[5]

Lack of trust between Native communities and external systems is a persistent complication to data sharing and effective programming. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has a long history of funding child welfare projects that intervene in Native communities. Recent ACF demonstration projects have cited Native American tribes' mistrust as a major barrier to interventions,[6] a result of the top-down, outside-in hierarchical approach to collaboration that has been historically employed by such projects.

This disconnect between potential partners, both in information and trust, coupled with the scope of Native Tribes' unmet needs, inspired SPIRIT to pursue its community-based

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[1] Children's Bureau, *Child Welfare Outcomes 2009-2012*, Appendix F, accessed at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/cwo-09-12.

[2] Centers for Disease Control, National Vital Statistics Reports, 2016, Table 1.

[3] Miller et al., "The Relation Between Child Maltreatment and Adolescent Suicidal Behavior: A Systematic Review and Critical Examination of the Literature," *Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev.*, 16(2) (June 2013): 146-172, where maltreatment (victimization) has an independent association with adolescent suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, with a subset of the research suggesting that sexual and emotional abuses have relatively stronger associations compared to physical abuse or neglect.

[4] National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) in 2000 indicates that at best, 61 percent of data on AI/AN child victimization cases are reported to state and federal databases.

[5] *Child Abuse and Neglect: An Examination of American Indian Data*, written by Kathleen Earle, December 2000.

[6] Porter et al., "Best Outcomes for Indian Children," Child Welfare 91.3 (May-June 2012): 135; and Maria Scannapieco and Mary Iannone, "Native American Indian child welfare system change: implementation of a culturally appropriate practice model across three tribal child welfare systems," Child Welfare 91.3 (May-June 2012): 157.
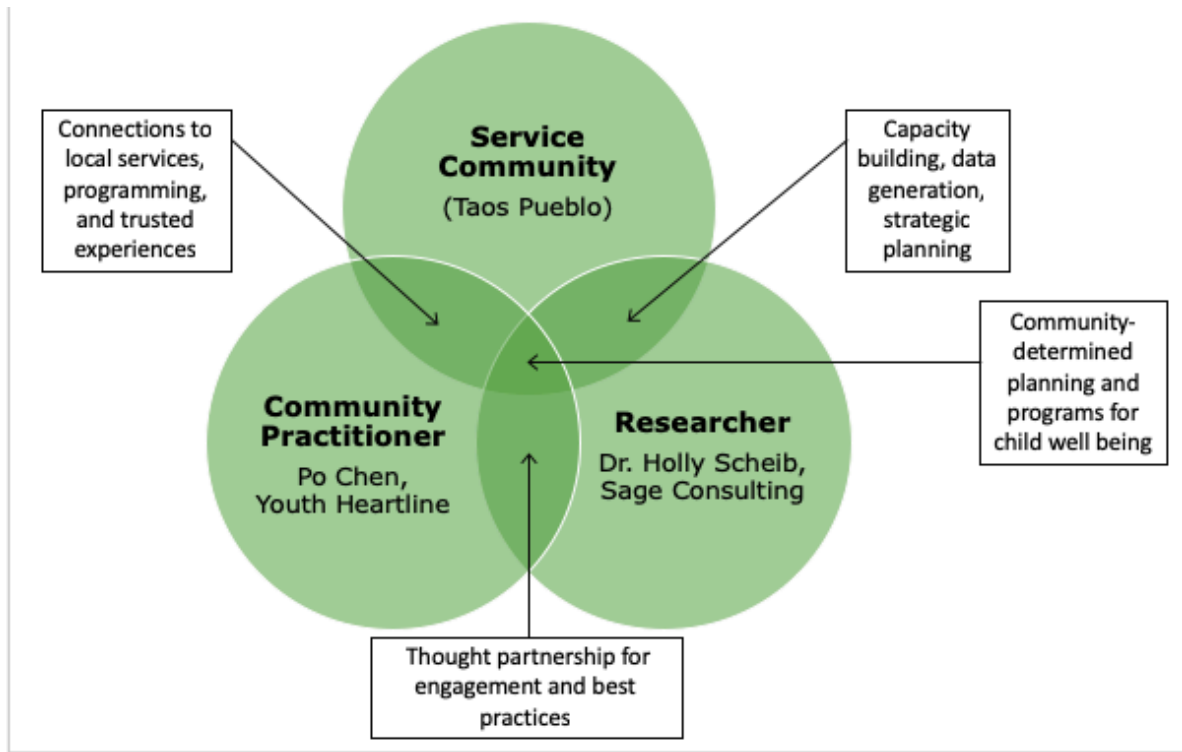
approach. This approach is rooted in the partnership of a local community child welfare practitioner, a participatory scientist, and leadership within a local Native community. SPIRIT seeks to understand the factors that contribute to child victimization in Native American tribes, identify the most effective mitigation and intervention activities, and clarify how to cooperatively implement and manage these services with Native American tribal partners. To do this, SPIRIT uses participatory methods that invest in trusting relationships, honors the knowledge of community members through capacity building, and creates community-generated knowledge and solutions.

Addressing the Problem

The CVR Fellowship allowed SPIRIT to explore a method for understanding Taos Pueblo children that invested heavily in relationship building, implemented a three-entity model of partnership, and utilized community-based, participatory research techniques that respected tribal traditions and values. As the research and capacity building techniques employed by this method rely on the integrity of an effective engagement process, SPIRIT focused on engagement as a core activity.

This engagement process began in 2014 with trust-building between Youth Heartline and Taos Pueblo. This led to a 2015 community event called Healing of Hearts that focused on historical grief, intergenerational trauma, and their lasting impacts, and continued with the establishment of a family navigator program jointly administered by Youth Heartline and Taos Pueblo to assist in family services. Trust between the community practitioner and the Taos Pueblo community was consistently reinforced by both partners through daily interactions and visibility. In 2017, Youth Heartline brought on Sage Consulting to develop SPIRIT, expanding from two partners to three and therefore setting the stage for SPIRIT's tri-lateral model of engagement. This model features three distinct partners: the community practitioner (Po Chen, Executive Director of Youth Heartline), the researcher (Dr. Holly Scheib of Sage Consulting), and the service community (the Taos Pueblo Native American community). This triad structure and the nature of each relationship are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The triad roles and relationships of SPIRIT

Connections to local services, programming, and trusted experiences

Service Community
(Taos Pueblo)

Capacity building, data generation, strategic planning

Community-determined planning and programs for child well being

Community Practitioner
Po Chen,
Youth Heartline

Researcher
Dr. Holly Scheib,
Sage Consulting

Thought partnership for engagement and best practices

Each of the pairs within the triad model represents a relationship that builds trust, offers opportunity for personal connection, and has particular activities of collegial cooperation. Together, these efforts provide a responsive and relatable system that respects the needs and utilizes the expertise of each entity.

These relationships grew organically through the process of developing SPIRIT, and they have revealed their value and impact over the course of the Fellowship. The community practitioner initially served as a trust bridge between the researcher and service community. As the researcher-service community relationship developed, the community practitioner remained engaged as an active participant in workshops, a thought partner in engagement, and as the day-to-day face of SPIRIT, moving within the community as a known and trusted resource for child protection programming. The researcher has access to the Taos Pueblo community from this trust platform, as well as the ability to develop techniques and ideas with an independent partner who has experience in the service community. The Taos Pueblo community (leadership, program staff, and general members) are able to connect to the community practitioner and the researcher, both as individuals and together as SPIRIT, deepening these multifaceted relationships.

This triad model also offers multiple opportunities for cross-learning. For example, the community practitioner has gained insight into new training methods for staff, indicator development, and tribal child wellness practices. The researcher has learned the

practice implications of general child welfare systems and how they interact with Taos Pueblo, and has been able to develop new ways to refine engagement and data collection processes. The researcher-community practitioner couple, illustrating their own opportunities for shared learning, present a partnership model to Taos Pueblo, setting the expectation for how the larger triad relationship can support each entity.

Together, these three partners work together to create community-determined, community-defined plans and programs that are based in a shared vision for child well-being that can exist within local, regional, state, and national systems.

Data Sources

During the CVR Fellowship period, SPIRIT convened two working groups to collect data to identify and understand community values, strengths, and the Taos Pueblo vision for the thriving child. The first working group, held over two days in May 2018, convened 11 stakeholders in the tribe's formal child welfare system including social services employees, home visitors, teachers and educators, tribal court staff, the tribal administrator, and members of a Tribal Council Resolution-created Priority Process Team. The second working group, held in June 2018, convened 11 Taos Pueblo youth, ages 12 to 17.

The methodology for the groups was based on anti-colonial, dialogic relationship-building practice, where the facilitator recognizes his or her positionality vis-a-vis historical power structures and conducts sessions with egalitarian discourse that involves idea generation, comparative thinking, differentiating of ideas, and discovery of new knowledge. These discussions occurred in the context of iterative, critically reflexive exercises that allowed for the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge.

Data was generated and analyzed through collected photographs, word associations, collective drawings, collective stories, group presentation, prioritization, data organization, and ranking -- with repetition of these exercises in a manner that multiplies their impact and builds participant skill. For example, participants in small groups were asked to create a drawing that represents a core theme of their community, with each person within the group equally represented in that drawing by a color unique to them. This process, requiring group communication, coordination, symbolic references, and pictorial summary of ideas, was conducted multiple times (multiplication), creating several drawings on one theme. These pictorial data sources were used by participants to identify words representing core themes (word-theme associations), which were combined into "stories" describing the community and then passed from group to group for editing, combination, and expansion.

This methodology can be used to create mission and vision statements, to identify core values, and to clarify themes of community importance. The participants are guided by

the participatory action researcher, who has a vision of what type of data is needed but is also flexible and responsive to group needs, changing techniques as necessary. As such, the methodology itself is grounded in partnership: the facilitators present the exercises and conditions of the work, teaching and directing the vision of the product; the participants provide all the informational data, identify their salient features, and construct an appropriate context for their interpretation.

Participants in SPIRIT's May and June 2018 workshops generated data through interactive group exercises that called on their skills as community experts, program service providers, parents, and tribal members. Guided by facilitators, the participants shaped this data into actionable goals and indicators while simultaneously learning skills in leadership, self-awareness, group process, and strategic planning.

Results

This first stage of the SPIRIT approach sought to provide actionable structure to a Taos Pueblo-specific vision of the healthy child. Data generated included structural signifiers for child well-being from both adult and youth perspectives. This was achieved through the described exercises, which generated goals, objectives, indicator structure, and priority intervention areas. Following the workshops, participants and their relevant tribal systems applied the community-generated knowledge and structure to strategic planning exercises and to operationalizing the newly revised Tribal Children's Code. As reported by participants, some of the areas where the data had impact include the development of agency interpretations of "a child in need of care" and the development of child welfare interventions based on strengths perspectives. Priorities that emerged from the working group have been directly applied to tribal resolution priority planning through a process that is being facilitated by the SPIRIT partners through a separate, direct contract with Taos Pueblo. The data generated through this additional work is being applied to planning documents in real time for the creation of programs in education, housing, economic development, and community health that reflect on child needs and family support.

Results regarding engagement, participatory process, and capacity building were far exceeded. To assess these factors, written qualitative evaluations were collected from participants who finished the two-day May workshop. Participants found the process and approach **novel** (*"vastly different from any workshop I have done"*); **tangible** (*"[d]eveloping meaningful programs in my work will be totally different!"*); **valuable** (*"I have the knowledge, training, and tools deep within myself to be an advocate for change"*); and **honored the culture and traditions of Taos Pueblo** (*"[f]inally a process that works for tribal communities!"*).

These quotations speak to the effectiveness of this anti-colonial, dialogic relationship-building practice within this community.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This Fellowship supported the exploration of an engagement process that featured deep trust building, participatory data collection, and capacity building with Taos Pueblo. Its results suggest that investment in critically reflexive processes and relationships can have positive impact on tribal systems, external partnerships, and the development and implementation of programming. Furthermore, the cross-engagement seen in these workshops suggest that currently disparate tribal systems have great potential to integrate and streamline child protection services.

Based on this project's results, engagement and trust building using a triad-type structure may be an effective way for external entities to partner with tribal communities more generally. Allowing tribal communities to conduct these types of workshops may inspire them to be more open to new programming, as they offer opportunities for development of the program planning and management skills needed for successful implementation and sustainability. In short, SPIRIT may be a model for cooperative intervention with tribal communities as it has shown to be respectful, community-driven, and transformative for its participants. Adoption of this model would represent a shift in child protection policy to where tribal communities have more opportunity to exercise self-determination in child protection within the greater United States, and increased interest in engaging with external services that operate as supportive partners. It also signals practitioners to remain flexible and open to tribal vision, both in terms of what programs are developed and which indicators are used to describe family situations and child needs.

Sustaining the Partnership

The SPIRIT partnership is currently sustained through additional employment contracts to continue strategic planning with Taos Pueblo and through general child protection programming grant support. These activities allow for the community practitioner and the research partners to continue to explore their working relationship and the ways that they may improve on community-based capacity building methods. The SPIRIT partnership seeks continued research-practice engagement concerning victim services with tribal communities.