

Notes from the Center

The Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health

Issue 7, January 2009

Dear Friends,

From the Director...



Warm greetings, and may the blessings of the New Year be with you. On behalf of the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health, I give thanks this year for the circle of friends who continue to buoy our work on behalf of Native peoples. We are marking our 29th year of partnership with tribes to overcome the major health disparities of Native American children and families.

I continue to bear witness to the huge disparities that exist between the health and well-being of Natives and non-Natives in our country. When I am confronted with the disparate rates of diabetes, suicide, teen childbearing and injury-related deaths, just to name a few – it is clear to me that Native tribes remain the most underserved ethnic group in our country today. We have much work to do.

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Regardless of the major economic uncertainties facing our nation, the Center for American Indian Health remains steadfast in our commitment to improve the lives of American Indians across the country. A sample of our flagship programs currently include:

- a parent education home visiting program called, “Family Spirit,” delivered by Native paraprofessionals employed by the Center to the most vulnerable young parents and children on reservations.
- the Native Vision youth development program that links professional athletes, public health experts and tribal leaders to promote healthy minds, bodies, families and communities for Native youngsters. More than 10,000 youth have been served to date through annual camps and after-school programs.
- a new nutrition promotion/obesity prevention initiative that will work with first-time mothers during pregnancy to prepare them and their families for a lifetime of healthy eating.
- a family-based mental health outreach program linking “natural helpers” employed by the Center and community elders to families at risk for depression and suicide.
- infectious disease prevention programs targeting high rates of childhood respiratory illnesses and asthma.

Meanwhile, our current scholarship program supported more than 150 American Indian scholars to attend public health institutes last year and four Native scholars who are currently enrolled in graduate or doctoral programs at Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions. These individuals will represent the generation who will lead their tribes back to autonomy and self-sufficiency.

In the words of a friend of the Center’s, Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation— “Although we are in different boats, you in your life boat, and we in our canoe, we share the same river of life.” We cannot succeed in our work alone and are so thankful to you who have chosen to support our work and share the same river of life.

With wishes for peace and happiness in the coming season,

Mathuram Santosham, MD, MPH

Director, Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health



Behavioral Health Update

Cradling Our Future Serves Over 300 Young Families

Educator Pauline Fields Shares Her Experiences Working With Young Mothers



"I enjoy the personal interaction with the participants in giving the lessons one-on-one. Conducting the lessons in their homes provides a comfortable atmosphere for them, and it encourages them to open up and ask questions so we can accomplish as much as possible.

-- Pauline Fields

The Cradling Our Future study has been ongoing since 2005 in four of the Center's Navajo and Apache field sites. The goal of Cradling Our Future is to learn how the Family Spirit intervention improves young mothers' competence to care for their babies, helps mothers have better life outcomes, and improves children's health and behavior outcomes. In May 2008, the Cradling Our Future team reached its recruitment goal. A total of 322 young mothers have been enrolled in the project across the four sites.

The Family Spirit intervention that is being evaluated in Cradling Our Future consists of over 40 in-home lessons that are taught between the young mother's pregnancy and her child's 3rd birthday. The lessons cover a wide range of maternal and child health topics, such as prenatal care, substance abuse prevention, injury prevention, infant care, reproductive health, nutrition, child physical and emotional development, and parenting skills.

Cradling Our Future staff member Pauline Fields is a Family Health Educator at the Fort Defiance site. Pauline has worked for Johns Hopkins for 20 years, beginning in 1998 with the Infectious Disease prevention team and working in recent years with the Behavioral Health prevention team to serve young families. In reflecting on what she enjoys most about her current position, Pauline said "I enjoy the personal interaction with the participants in giving the lessons one-on-one. Conducting the lessons in their homes provides a comfortable atmosphere for them, and it encourages them to open up and ask questions so we can accomplish as much as possible. In getting to know these participants personally, there are times I feel like a mother, grandmother, teacher, and mentor to them." In thinking about the impact of the lessons on her participants, she added, "I think the lessons are helpful to the participants because as they learn, they become more proactive in their lives. They often share their feelings, hardships, life stories, and dreams with us. Throughout the lesson curriculum, they begin to realize what is important."

Cradling Our Future is the largest home visiting trial among Native American communities, and is unique in its use of Native paraprofessionals as home visitors. Proving the effectiveness of local tribal health workers to impact long-term health and behavior outcomes for parents and children harkens a healthier future for Native communities.

COF Meeting Update



On October 2-3, 2008, the Cradling Our Future team assembled in Tuba City on the Navajo Reservation for an annual retreat. Fifteen female Native American field staff from three reservations (Navajo, White Mountain and San Carlos Apache) were joined by eight colleagues from the Baltimore office for two days of training and reflection. One of the primary goals of the retreat was to come together as a team and create a project vision that is shared and resonates with all team members. Field staff members, who included health educators, research assistants, and project evaluators, shared stories with their team members about the many challenges and rewards of their daily project work. In creating a vision, staff members were encouraged to connect the goals of the project, particularly its emphasis on family strengthening, to the numerous obstacles faced in their participating communities.

Acknowledging how children in their communities often seem forced to grow up far too quickly, staff expressed the hope that their work with young pregnant women and mothers will ultimately create a world in which every child is wanted and able to experience a full and rewarding childhood. In discussing and reflecting upon their experiences, the Cradling Our Future team recognized how strong families provide the foundation on which healthy communities, hopeful children, and better tomorrows are built. The retreat ended on a note of inspiration and empowerment, in which team members recognized that change starts at home and within each of us. One day at a time, one individual at a time, one community at a time, we can and we will build stronger families and stronger futures together!

Empowering Our Spirit

Since 1990, the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) has experienced suicide rates that are 4 times the U.S. rate and 2 times the overall American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) rate in the United States. The highest rates are among 15-24 year olds and have been up to 12 times higher than the rates for U.S. all races. Empowering our Spirit is a comprehensive, integrated program that builds upon our ongoing tribal-university partnership to prevent Apache youth suicide known as the Celebrating Life initiative. Empowering Our Spirit (EOS) has engaged tribal leaders to identify evidence-based practices that could be adapted to fit their community, culture, and traditions. The WMAT is also continuing their practice of using research and evaluation to strengthen this endeavor to help the community with this significant public health problem.

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"If today I had a young  
mind to direct, to start  
on the journey of life . . .  
I would set that child's  
feet in the path of my  
forefathers.  
~~~~~

-Luther Standing Bear

One part of the EOS programs works with tribal stakeholders to educate the community and promote factors that protect against youth suicide. This is accomplished through the engagement of tribal political, health/social service, religious and educational leaders in the development and implementation of a community-wide education campaign rooted in Apache traditions. Educational and awareness initiatives occur in district-wide meetings, schools, churches, traditional gatherings and through the local media.

In addition, the EOS program promotes early identification of Apache youth at-risk for self-harm. This is accomplished through "caretaker trainings" which target community members who have heavy contact with youth, including bus drivers, coaches, teachers, police, medical and mental health professionals, as well as

(cont. pg. 4)

Empowering Our Spirit (cont.)

spiritual leaders. The community has held three care taker trainings thus far. Community members who have completed the trainings have said, "The training helped me to realize that I can help and make a difference when it comes to the problem of suicide." Others have said, "I now know what kind of help I can be to someone who wants to commit suicide." And finally, "The rates of suicide are so high here on our reservation, this training helps us to recognize the signs and symptoms and try to lend a hand."



In addition, an Elder's Council has been formed and has just started to meet and develop school- and community-based life skills workshops for youth and parents. As part of this work, local Whiteriver and Baltimore Johns Hopkins staff recently spent time with the Elders getting to know one another and enjoying a traditional lunch. The Elders taught the staff how to prepare various food using traditional methods. The entire meal was prepared from scratch outside the Fort Apache museum this last September in Whiteriver, Arizona.

Another innovative aspect of the EOS program employs trained tribal members, known as Natural Helpers, to implement two interventions designed to supplement mental health services for youth who have made a recent suicide attempt and their families. One intervention is called "*New Hope*", and it will help youth attempters and their family members develop a safety plan and connect with community treatment services. A centerpiece of the "*New Hope*" intervention is a video that was produced with Apache community members in Spring 2008. The video portrays several key messages including: the community takes youth suicide seriously; youth are not alone; there are people who care about these youth and want them to get the help they need; and that this is a turning point in their lives where they have a chance to make a change and create a New Hope for themselves. The video has been previewed by community stake holders and received very positive feedback.



The second intervention, called "*Embracing Life*" is still under development. It will consist of six months of home-based aftercare that teaches the youth who attempted suicide and their family important coping and problem solving skills. The "*Embracing Life*" lessons will teach youth strategies for coping with negative emotions, effective communication skills, how to problem-solve in risky situations, anger management, and how to recognize self-destructive behaviors. Over the next few months we will begin pilot-testing both the "*New Hope*" and "*Embracing Life*" interventions. This comprehensive community-based program is the first of its kind in the country. The White Mountain Apache Tribe deserves national recognition for the courage and innovation it has exercised to teach all of us about how a community can overcome great challenges.

Native Vision Camp

12th Annual Native Vision Sports and Life Skills Camp

The 12th Annual Native Vision camp was held in Bernalillo, NM from June 12-14, 2008. It was hosted by the Southern Pueblo Tribes and registered more than 500 youth from over 15 tribal nations who were coached by 60 of the nation's top professional and collegiate athletes. Approximately 800 community members from the host tribe took part in camp activities, including a community feast, cultural celebrations, parenting workshops and opening and closing ceremonies.



The camp offered six sports clinics, including football, basketball, volleyball, soccer, track and lacrosse. In addition, JHU organized a variety of life skills and self-expression workshops for campers and adults. The campers attended leadership workshops in which they participated in interactive activities to promote team work and a vision for their future. They took part in a media workshop where they wrote and produced their own Public Service Announcements. An arts and crafts workshop was also offered in which they produced sand art to illustrate their personal vision for how they would, "Stride, Soar, and Succeed" - the camp's motto. Parents, chaperones and community members attended a parent workshop to learn parenting tips. The workshop was geared toward building parent's skills to promote school readiness in their children, with a special emphasis on literacy. In addition, the parent workshop participants were joined by Scottie Graham, retired running back from the Minnesota Vikings and father of two. Mr. Graham emphasized the important role parents play in shaping children's lives, and how they themselves must be role models in terms of completing education, reading and academic learning. He also underscored the importance of working together to promote cultural respect and pride and setting high expectations for children, families and communities.

The Southern Pueblo Tribes organized cultural events and community feasts to promote Native pride and traditional strengths for camp participants. More than 200 local volunteers assisted with these efforts. In addition, Native Vision awarded three \$5000 scholarships to Native students entering college (see p. 6). Scholarship recipients were selected through a competitive narrative application and review process administered by the Center. Native Vision pro-athlete mentors participated in a large community service event in which more than 300 non-perishable food boxes from Feed the Children were distributed to needy and extremely grateful families on the Southern Pueblo reservations.

We extend gratitude to the people of the Southern Pueblo Tribes and Bernalillo High School for being gracious hosts for the past three camps held in Bernalillo. We look forward to next year's camp to be held on June 4-6, 2009 in Whiteriver, AZ on the White Mountain Apache Reservation. Stay tuned for more information!



Scholarship Recipients

2008 Native Vision Scholarship Recipients

Native Vision awarded three high school seniors entering college a \$5,000 scholarship at the June 2008 camp. It was a very difficult job to choose three people from a pool of more than 60 applicants from across the nation. The following three individuals were chosen for their academic and extra-curricular accomplishments as well as their hopes and dreams of serving their communities after completing college.

Krishanna Coriz is a motivated and enthusiastic young woman with a passion for helping others. Throughout high school, she maintained a challenging schedule of coursework and athletics, playing volleyball and basketball for all four years and taking advantage of her school's Advanced Placement program. It was through this program that she was able to combine her desire to help others with her academic skills, and decided to become an EMT. She is attending the University of New Mexico EMT program and after obtaining her degree, she plans to bring her newly acquired skills back to her Pueblo of Santo Domingo by working as a local EMT first responder.

Aaron Celario is an ambitious and inspiring young man. Throughout high school, Aaron excelled in academics as well as athletics. He challenged himself with honors classes and prepared for his academic future by attending the Colorado University Upward Bound Program. Aaron was president of his class, sat on the student council and participated in track, cross-country and basketball, all while maintaining an outstanding GPA. Aaron is attending the University of New Mexico and plans to participate in a rigorous pre-med program in preparation for his ultimate goal of becoming a surgeon and helping to design and construct a medical facility that can cater to the needs of his local Navajo community.

Dion Francis III, or "Trey" as his friends and family know him, is a model student and dedicated athlete. He has received many honors throughout high school and was named salutatorian of his graduating class at Sequoyah High School. Trey is attending the US Military Academy at West Point, a prestigious school with a tradition of accepting only the brightest and most qualified applicants. He is pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering and after completing his service in the United States Army, he plans to establish his own engineering firm, which will design body armor systems for soldiers.

We are very proud of Krishanna, Aaron and Dion and look forward to reporting back on their success!

Evening With The Stars

Native Vision
13th Annual Evening with the Stars Fundraiser
Wednesday, December 10, 2008
The Galleria at Lafayette Centre, Washington, DC



Native Vision hosted its 13th annual fundraiser "Evening with the Stars" on Wednesday, December 10, 2008 at The Galleria at Lafayette Centre in Washington, D.C. An evening of gourmet dining was combined with a unique silent and live auction of sports memorabilia and Native American art. Auction highlights included an all-expense-paid trip for two to Super Bowl XLIII in Tampa, Florida and a Pro Bowl package to Hawaii. All proceeds benefited the Native Vision Sports and Life Skills Camp. The next camp slated for June '09 will mark the 13th anniversary of the program.

For more information on "Evening with the Stars" or the Native Vision program, please contact Marlena Hammen, Native Vision Coordinator, at 410-955-6931 or mhammen@jhsph.edu.

NV Year-Round Program



Native Vision has expanded its reach this year to develop year-round programming in three tribal communities. The communities include White Mountain Apache, Southwest Pueblos, and Haudensaunee Nation. Native Vision's year-round programs have been designed to promote four major areas of well being for Native children and families: 1) Healthy Minds, 2) Healthy Bodies, 3) Healthy Families, and 4) Healthy Communities. Each program area involves a variety of school, community and home-based outreach. A description of each program arm is provided below.

Healthy Minds: The goal of "Healthy Minds" is to promote children's intellectual development and educational achievement. Healthy Minds activities include:

- * workshops to train American Indian youth and teachers to design media campaigns that promote wellness and decrease high risk behaviors of Native student populations across the country;
- * a tutoring program to assist at risk youth to successfully bridge the transition from middle to high school;
- * arts and crafts projects with elders to promote self-expression and cultural pride.

Healthy Bodies: The goal of "Healthy Bodies" is to increase levels of fitness for children with the aim of reducing high rates of diabetes and obesity.

Strategies for achieving this goal include:

- * structured in-school and after-school recreation programs that track children's levels of fitness and changes in Body-Mass Index (BMI). Specific emphasis has been on developing, implementing and evaluating a 10-week experiential running curriculum spanning topics from running techniques, nutrition, history of running in native communities, traditional foods and other life skills topics;
- * semi-annual mini-camps conducted at each site highlighting two sports and integrating various life skills workshops at each camp;
- * recreational sports leagues to help kids get fit and stay out of trouble on week ends and in non-school hours; and
- * fitness programming for adults, including specific classes for elders.



Healthy Families: The goal of Healthy Families is to strengthen vulnerable families and improve health and life outcomes for young American Indian parents and their children. Current strategies include:

- * media campaigns to promote positive parenting; and
- * relationship building and life skills workshops conducted at Family Institutes for high school teens.

Healthy Communities: The goal of Healthy Communities is to strengthen American Indian Communities. Strategies will include:

- * traditional foods cooking classes that re-introduce and educate community members about traditional foods and how to prepare them;
- * community gardens to grow and cultivate traditional crops; and
- * environmental education and awareness projects to enhance the well being of the earth and ecosystem.



Training News



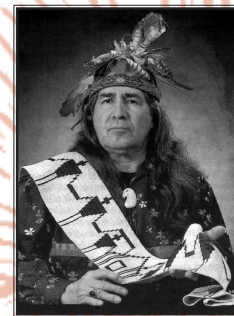
Danielle Tsingine

New Training Coordinator

We are pleased to welcome **Danielle Tsingine, B.A.**, as the new **Training Coordinator** for the Center for American Indian Health. She will coordinate the Center's Summer and Winter Institutes, the Native Scholars Scholarship program, and the Training of Field Staff (TOFS) program. A recent graduate of Stanford University, Danielle received her B.A. in Human Biology with a concentration in "Public Health of Underserved Communities." She hopes to learn more about Native American health issues and policy, as well as connect with other Native scholars. Danielle is from the small community of St. Michaels, AZ on the Navajo Reservation.

Native American Heritage Month

The Center was proud to celebrate November 2008 as Native American Heritage Month. On November 3rd, we were honored to have **Dr. Oren Lyons, a Faithkeeper in the Onondaga Nation**, speak at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. He shared how the formation of US democracy in the United States was based on a model of governance in use by the Haudenoshonee (Iroquois) for over a thousand years. He also discussed the importance of living in harmony with the web of life, and working together to protect our Earth.



Dr. Oren Lyons

'08 Summer Institute

On July 7 – 11, 2008 the Center hosted 58 Native scholars for two courses to promote skills in health research and practice. One was entitled "Introduction to Quantitative and Qualitative Research for American Indian Health" and was taught by Drs. Britta Mullany and Aruna Chandran. The second, "Introduction to Data Management Using American Indian Health Data" was taught by Dr. Gene Millar and Mindy Perilla. These courses focused on techniques for tribal communities to assess and address priority health problems.

The Center's second Indigenous Health Institute was held July 21-25, 2008 in Banff, Alberta in Canada and spotlighted the importance of community ownership of research in Indigenous nations. This year's course focused on community-based participatory research (CBPR) approaches. Forty students attended, representing Indigenous communities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Mexico and the US. The goal of the course was for students to develop skills in CBPR approaches so that they will be better prepared for designing, understanding, and implementing CBPR projects in Indigenous populations.



A Success Story



Sky Nez, Apache and Navajo, receiving the first Public Health Certificate in American Indian Health

The Johns Hopkins Certificate Program in American Indian Health Training will continue to make waves in Native waters for years to come. I am thankful the NARCH Program was facilitated by Johns Hopkins University for the White Mountain Apache Tribe. The program in Whiteriver, AZ sponsored several community Public Health outreach meetings to inform the communities of health issues and studies. At these meetings I, Sky Nez, editor of the Fort Apache Scout Newspaper of the White Mountain Apache Tribe, became aware of the possibilities offered by Johns Hopkins, NARCH trainings and institutes at the Baltimore campus.

I first attended the institute in January of 2004. I thoroughly enjoyed the first two courses and applied for the summer session of institute. I repeated this process and continued to learn of Native American Public Health. I have utilized the institute courses in my role as a journalist for my tribe. The institute courses provided insight and education on Public Health issues that have guided my selection of health-related articles and coverage of health events that benefit my people. As a man with many medical conditions, I have become a proactive patient in working with my doctors to attain better holistic health. It is through the institute courses and information provided by our lecturers that have guided my interest in becoming a better patient.

I am honored to be the first recipient of The Certificate in American Indian Public Health Training. I hold the relationship Johns Hopkins maintains with my tribe dear to my heart, for I know great strides in Medical and Public Health have been accomplished for the benefit of humanity. I didn't set out to be the first graduate. My interest in the institute courses and continuing to follow up on my course work and requirements led me to this honor, for which I am truly grateful.

For those who are considering attaining the certificate, I say, "Accomplish it!" The American Indian Public Health Training Certificate Program offered by Johns Hopkins University's Center for American Indian Health is a great opportunity that will benefit generations to come in your family and community. You have the opportunity to learn of the health of Native America and the studies and research that accompany this great work among our people. You will learn an ocean full of public health education that will continue to ripple through your community and your posterity.



Thank you (Ahiyi'e),

Sky Nez

Infectious Disease Prevention

The Center for American Indian Health has been blessed with a trusting and mutually respectful relationship with the White Mountain Apache and Navajo Tribes for nearly 30 years. Our work with these tribes over the past three decades has saved thousands of American Indian children from widespread infectious diseases and hospitalization.

One of our most recent projects partnered with the Apache and Navajo tribes to address RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus). Our work with both tribes proved that a new vaccine, Motavizumab, prevented 83% of the babies who got the product from being hospitalized by this disease. It also prevented 71% of outpatient visits for related respiratory infections. We are continuing to follow children who received the product to see if the intervention results in lower asthma rates.

RSV disease remains a significant problem in the Navajo and Apache communities. We are grateful to have identified a new product that is extremely effective in reducing the amount of serious RSV disease that affects these beautiful children.

This is just one example of the important work our dedicated staff, at home and in the field, perform on a daily basis to overcome the illnesses that effect American Indian babies, children and their parents across the country.

The Center is committed to our work with American Indian tribes and we will continue our mission to prevent diseases that are of disproportionate morbidity and mortality in American Indians.

For more information on our infectious disease programs, please contact Dr. Kate O'Brien or Dr. Mathuram Santosham at 410-955-6931.



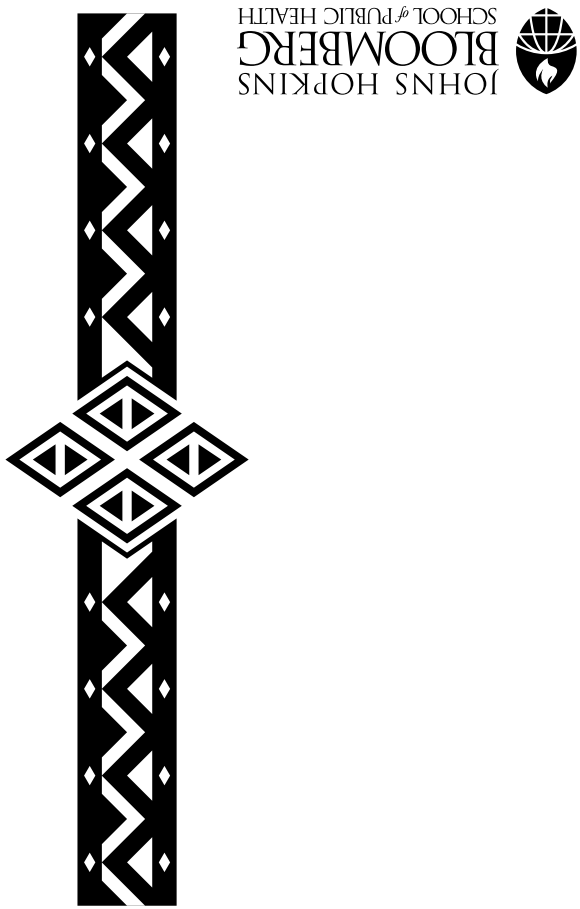
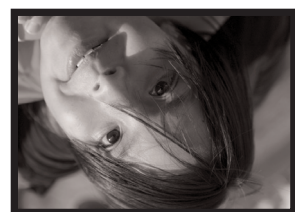
Kudos Corner

Our most gracious thanks go to the numerous individuals, foundations, corporations and organizations who have supported the Center's many programs over the years. The following list are those who have made contributions from July 1, 2007 - June 30, 2008.

Reverend David Altman
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