


NATIONAL INDIAN HEALTH BOARD'S 28TH ANNUAL CONSUMER CONFERENCE

NATIVE YOUTH TRACK REPORT

National Indian
Health Board 



The 2011 Native Youth Track Report

Introduction

The following report outlines the planning process, agenda, and a brief overview of the outcomes of the 2011 Native Youth Track (NYT) Report. The purpose of the NYT was to invite Native youth from across Indian Country to involve the youth in the national discussion on American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth health and wellness. This Track took place in conjunction with the National Indian Health Board's (NIHB) 28th Annual Consumer Conference (ACC) on Sunday, September 25th – Tuesday, September 27th, 2011. A Native Youth Track Planning Committee comprised of staff from NIHB, The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY), and Healthy Native Community Partnerships (HNCP), identified the goals of the event, created an application for participation, recruited applicants, created an event agenda, and facilitated activities during the event.

Twenty-six youth and young adults, ages 12-18, registered and attended the NYT as leaders and advocates within their own communities. During the NYT these participants, helped to identify issues and problems within their own communities. They also worked as a team to devise some recommendations to Tribal Leaders and Policymakers about how to better their community and make a positive impact.

Purpose and Goals

The two and a half day track was offered during the 28th NIHB ACC. The concept for the NIHB ACC Native Youth Track is based on the theme for the overall NIHB ACC; Health, Hope, and Heroes: Using the Foundations of Tribal Values and Knowledge to Advance Native Health is essential to our Native youth. The conference theme was adjusted so that youth will be able to address two areas integral to restoring balance in their lives; physical and emotional health. These traditional concepts and teachings of physical and emotional balance have guided our American Indian and Alaska Native people. For generations, we have been taught that our physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual well-being is interconnected with our community and what affects our surroundings will affect our health. The NYT focus on obesity and suicide issues will help to guide youth in understanding what it means to have a healthy balanced life, restore hope in their communities and encourage Native youth to become the heroes of tomorrow.

The overall goal will be to involve the youth in the national discussion on AI/AN youth health and wellness. Two main actions for this conference will include:

- Help to raise the profile of the youth suicide and obesity epidemics in American Indian/Alaska Native communities.

- Establish a Native Youth Health Advisory Council to assist NIHB and other partners in developing youth-guided strategies for suicide and obesity prevention.

Planning Process

Developed in partnership with the NIHB, CNAY and the HNCP, the NYT planning process stretched over three months with two face-to-face meetings and five conference calls. The NYT planning committee divided many components between each partner organization, but all components were agreed upon unanimously. Many other organizations offered up their time and service during the youth track to provide information, trainings or financial support. Below are those sponsors and contributors:

- Alaska Native Mental Health Trust Authority
- Nike N7
- National Council of Urban Indian Health
- Southeast Alaska Region Health Consortium
- Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin
- Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association
- Choctaw Native

Youth Summit Participants

Before disseminating the application for the NYT, the NYT Planning committee had to identify the participants to invite to the NYT. The committee wanted participants to network and have a good time, but they also wanted participants to contribute by sharing their stories, brainstorming thoughtfully, exploring new ideas, learning new tools, and problem solving as a team. It was decided that all levels of leadership experience were important to improving health in native communities. We defined “youth” as being between the ages of 12 years and 18 years old. The committee also considered that youth would be traveling out of their familiar community to a new environment and that abilities to travel independently and be comfortable and adapt to an unfamiliar setting were important, however, youth chaperones were required to be present and actively participate in the NYT. The application process included a short essay question, asking the youth to describe why they would like to attend and an invitation to submit photos from the community in a Photo Voice Project.

The NYT application was converted into an electronic PDF file that included a cover page introducing the purpose of the NYT, the application itself, and the Photo Voice Project information. This completed packet was disseminated electronically through NIHB’s, CNAY’s, and HNCP’s email lists of Tribes, Tribal organizations, Tribal leaders, other organizations that serve or advocate for native children and youth; forwarding of the application was encouraged. The NYT was also publicized via a web page on the NIHB’s website. The NIHB designed and maintained the page. Information about the NYT could be accessed through this website. All materials related to the NYT were posted through this online resources.

Ongoing communication about the NYT with several contacts and other allies occurred through phone conversations, email correspondence, and face-to-face interactions. Applicants were asked

to send their application to the NIHB Public Health Project Coordinator electronically through email, fax or through physical mail. Initially youth were given approximately a month and a half to complete and return the application, but the deadline was later extended an additional week.

There were twenty-six registration forms collected for the NYT. There were 13 different and unique tribal communities represented from the Alaska, Phoenix and Albuquerque Areas.

The Event

When planning the NYT, the planning committee felt it was crucial to: 1) create a welcoming, respectful, and youth-driven event; 2) maintain a “safe space” during small and large discussion groups, meaning that individuals were not judged based on their personal stories, different opinions were respected, and each idea was valued; and 3: provide each participant with a chance to contribute in a way that felt comfortable.

The team recognized that some individuals might prefer sharing in small group settings, while others would become motivated and energized when working with a large group. They also recognized that there was limited time—as this event had many components for just two days—and that while the agenda should foster fun activities and chances for networking, it also had to include times for meaningful discussions that would result in a plan for action. For these reasons, planners formatted the day to include small group discussions, as well as large group activities.

Sunday September, 25th

Let’s Walk Through It

Youth participants and their chaperones were invited to attend, have dinner, and get to know other youth. Youth participated in activities that broke the ice and brought the group together. The Youth shared about their communities through a “River of Life” exercise and established group rules for the rest of the NYT.

To facilitate introductions, a version of the icebreaker activity “Speed Dating” was created that could be completed in a relatively unstructured format. Youth, Staff, Volunteers and Chaperones alike visited with one another, discussing who they were, where they came from and their favorite ice cream. It was many youths’ first time traveling to Anchorage, Alaska and the activity helped familiarize the attendees with each other and their new environment.

Later another ice breaker game was played to involve movement while still learning about one another in the group. As an additional bonus to the track, three NIHB Board Members, Ms. Sally Smith, Mr. Andy Joseph Jr. and Ms. Frances Secretaro France addressed the youth before dinner was served that evening. They welcomed their recommendations and hoped this time was used to get to know everyone in the group from other communities and learn more to help their communities back home.

Before beginning the first exercise, the group established group rules for the NYT. They all decided these would be followed by each and every participant. The following interactive

drawing exercise, “The River of Life” was used to help describe the communities that each participant had traveled from to attend the NYT. These drawings included pictures, words, quotes, etc.

Monday September, 26th

Let’s Get Physical

The youth began their day with a Traditional Dance Class. One Instructor and two Students from the Aleut community of St. Paul Island, Alaska attended the NYT. They were able to teach all the youth a “Welcome Dance” and the “Seal Harvest Dance”. The youth not only were dancing but being physically active while participating in a piece of Alaskan culture. They would later perform the “Welcome Dance” in front of over 700 NIHB Annual Consumer Conference (ACC) attendees including Tribal Leaders, Tribal Health professionals, and other distinguished guests.

Circle Up

After the morning session, the CNAY led the morning exercise which included an Native Youth specific game of Jeopardy, a Youth roundtable: “Voice Your Opinions”, a community service/observation at the local Covenant House Alaska and a Reflection Discussion.

The Roundtable discussion was set up with several rounds of discussion questions. This allowed the youth to talk about the unique concerns, challenges, successes, and ideas for possible solutions in AI/AN health and wellness. While each group was lead by chaperones the youth were given large sheets of paper to write on to describe what was being discussed in each group. At the end of each round each group selected a representative to report out to the group.

Get Involved and Give Back

After this roundtable discussion, the youth and chaperones headed over to the Covenant House Alaska, a emergency shelter for youth in the Anchorage Area. This is home to several Alaska Natives as well as other youth in the area when they have no where else to go. They were given a tour of the facilities and were able to ask questions about how the Covenant House helps native youth in the area. This shelter not only offers a place to sleep and meals to eat, but they have a resources center where youth are given help finding jobs or writing a resume.

Penny For Your Thoughts

The youth then had the opportunity to share a meal with many of the youth living at the Covenant House, the youth were given the opportunity to write words of encouragement on individuals stars. This service activity was an impactful experience for many youth attending the NYT and the planning committee wanted to be sure to give them an opportunity to discuss what they learned visiting the Covenant House. The youth joined together in a roundtable discussion focused on the issues affecting Native communities and reflected upon their involvement with the Covenant House.

“I never thought that there would be a place for homeless teens, and that their parents didn’t care for them. I hope there are more places for homeless teens.”

In the afternoon, the youth were able to present their “River of Life” drawings for each community. This gave the opportunity for each community to describe where they came from and more about the specific positive and negative aspects of their community.

If You Build It & Putting It All Together

As we continued to work towards a central goal of developing recommendations, the youth began a consensus workshop following dinner to develop strategies to address health and wellness issues currently facing Native Communities from a youth perspective. Tools for community engagement were reviewed, including a holistic model for change at the individual, family, community, and national policy levels. Strategic recommendations developed during this session from the Youth Participants were used to inform the National Indian Health Board Policy and Advocacy work, and program development at the Center for Native American Youth and the Healthy Native Communities Partnership. The compilation of this work is the “Sharing our Voice” video presentation. Many of the outcomes were taken from this video for this report.

Tuesday, September, 27th

From Our Mouth To Ears of Our Leaders

During the NIHB ACC general Plenary, the youth were able to welcome them to the conference and Alaska by offering a welcome dance, learned early in the track. They were also able to share the “Sharing our Voice” video with all the attendees in the general plenary. The keynote speakers at this year’s NIHB ACC conference, John Baker, winner of the 2011 Iditarod in Alaska, was able to spend a few minutes talking with the youth and sharing words of encouragement and inspiration. Callen Chythlook-Sifsof, U.S. National Team Snowboarder, the other keynote speaker, later recorded a video for the youth as she was not able to attend the track at that time. It was a very special and unexpected moment for many of the youth in attendance.

Sharing What we Know

During the morning session, the youth were able to hear from several notable guest speakers. Senator Mark Begich was able to share some words with the youth about the current status of the state’s efforts to impact health and wellness. He also was able to hear from the youth about what they are seeing and what they would like done in their communities. Several issues came up including; police involvement in lowering crime in many cities, towns and villages, domestic violence, obesity, substance abuse, and many more topics.

After lunch, the students were able to hear from two programs working towards lowering the incidence of obesity in their communities. Southeast Alaska Regional health Consortium and the Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin. SEARHC representative, Renae Mathson shared several digital stories with the group. These digital life stories paint a picture of your true identity, which can be used as a strength based exercise to fight negative influences in your life. This type of program allows youth and adults to benefit from telling their story. The Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin representative, Jerry Waukau, Health Administrator shared with the youth a presentation outlining the current health status of his Tribe and Bemidji region and how they are addressing some of the issues. One in particular program of interest is the Let’s Move in Indian Country Initiative run through the Office of First Lady and Department of the Interior. Both of these

presentations explored how traditional lifestyles and culture can be incorporated into program design to impact health and wellness in the community.

Hearing from a Leader

Dr. Yvette Robideaux shared her story with the youth regarding her background and how she came to be the Director of the Indian Health Service. The youth gained unique knowledge regarding the steps to becoming a leader in their community and this nation.

You Hold the Knowledge

The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) is creating a nation-wide resource website for Indigenous youth. NCUIH engaged the youth directly seeking to learn what resources can be provided to establish opportunities for success in transition to the next step in life. The youth participated in an ice-breaker game as well as discussion with prize incentives for answers. This style proved effective with engaging youth and keeping them interested in the discussion.

Helping Those We Love

The Choctaw Nation Behavioral Health Department offered a Suicide Prevention Workshop; Question, Persuade and Refer (QPR) in the afternoon for the Youth and chaperones. This session was led by Karen Hearod. The QPR Suicide Prevention training taught participants how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help. This was very beneficial for the youth seeking to gain tools to bring back to their community. Several youth mentioned that they would enjoy learning more about QPR and other Suicide Prevention Training Modules.

Calling All Youth

The youth finished the NYT with ideas of how to stay connected. Especially with other Native Youth from other regions of the country, including the possible development of a Youth Advisory Group for NIHB, and on-line learning and support community for Native Youth. The youth had the chance to share what their vision was for their own life as well as the Native Youth Health Advisory Committee (name subject to change). This was an important time for the youth to make commitments through an exercise facilitated by the HNCP team. Once finished with the exercise, the NIHB team will mail out the commitment cards to each youth, chaperone and staff participant to follow up on their progress.

Moving Forward

This section outlines the work completed by the Youth during the “Sharing our Voice” workshop. This workshop was categorized into the theme of the event; Health, Hope and Heroes. These comments were taken directly from youth participants.

HEALTH

Strengths

- **Community Support**

- Boys & Girls Club
- Basketball/Wrestling/other sports
- Elders keeping culture alive
- Open gym
- National Indian Health Board Program
- Young Life Club
- Pot lucks/ Indian Dance

Weaknesses

- Schools low on money
- Homelessness
- Academically not dedicated
- Adults providing alcohol and drugs to the teens/youth
- Low paying jobs
- Not enough jobs provided for the teens/youth
- Substance Abuse
- Completing Suicide
- Financial Problems
- Drug Tests
- No Positive Role Models
- Teen Pregnancy

HOPE

“I feel lost, I wish I knew my language and culture

Cirriculums that include Native language and culture”

“My textbooks are old

Better Education by updating cirriculum, instruction and textbooks”

“I wish we had more healthy food choices

Healthier school Lunches”

“In our future community, I would like to see success by more kids going to college and more sobriety. I would like to see more kids involved in our culture, by learning to dance, learning our language, and learning our way of life. I would like to see a healthier community with better health care and youth living healthy lifestyles.”

“I guess the message that I am trying to send out there is just to the youth is please just learn your Native, your Native culture. It’s important. It’s a big role and part of my life. It should be a big role and part of your life too.”

“Tribal Leaders need to come together and quit fighting because they set examples and they are also role models to the younger generation. Instead of acting childish, they need to step up and do their job which is to better the community, talk to all the people who do drugs or drink alcohol because they ain’t setting a good example either. And get programs for the drugs and alcohol, teen pregnancy, and all the other negative things younger adults and teens are doing these days.”

HEROES

“My name is Nicki Hawthorne and I am apart of “Influence the Difference: Youth Coalition.” We are located in Unalaska, Alaska. Our main reason for starting the group was to get rid of bullying and suicide in our community, but that’s not all. We work with people in other communities to see what their doing to help towns. We also work to get our school and youth free of drugs and alcohol and work with our local women’s shelter to stop domestic violence in our community.”

*“I am going to be talking about someone important to me, which is my Grandma. She’s been a hero to me since as long as I can remember and I think that communities need more Elders like that. One thing she really helps me with is keeping me sane. She really knows how to brighten up everybody’s day.”
-Shante Hudson-Cook*

“My name is Teresa Baldwin. I am from Kotzebue, Alaska and I am 17 years old. Suicide has effected my life greatly. I have started a non-profit organization based on Suicide prevention and awareness called “Hope for Alaska.” I travel around to different communities, share my story, and do community service projects in every school. I also raise money for homeless shelters across the state. I do this to help youth in every corner of Alaska realize that suicide is not the answer. I do this to help better my community and one day become a strong elder towards other generations.”

“Taughney Rukovishnikoff from St. Paul, Alaska. I am member of the program, Americorps Building Initiatives in Rural Community Health (BIRCH). I have about 30 youth participating in my program and I have pushed the youth to organize themselves and they have developed Health and Wellness activities and events to better themselves and make a statement in our community. Thank you.”

“My name is Megan Gregory. I am from Kake, Alaska. But currently work in Juneau at Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) as the Community Project Assistant and the Director for the Youth Ambassador Program, which was just recently launched this September. I created the Youth Ambassador Program to encourage youth to get involved in their communities and take action at an early age. The youth ambassadors will work with the “One is Too Many” Task Force at SEARHC during the school year to help raise awareness and prevent suicide in Alaska. As of today, there are six youth ambassadors representing Southeast Alaska, four of them are at this youth track today. I am proud to announce that the inaugural Youth Ambassadors; Teresa Baldwin, Anthony Edinshaw, Jamie Paddock, Shante Hudson-Cook, Patricia Jackson, and Naomi Houstus. The SEARHC “One is Too Many” Task Force is very excited to be working with these individuals and we look forward to a great year.”

Conclusions

This report summarized the creation and execution of the Native Youth Track designed to bring Native youth together to generate solutions and recommendations to improve health and wellness in their communities. It outlines the planning stages of the event and describes the event. It also presents the outcomes presented in the Moving Forward section. This track demonstrates that Native youth can be involved in the national discussion, and that they can have a voice in identifying the current status quo and areas for improvement.

We hope that this event and its corresponding report inspire others to provide youth with opportunities to offer their voice to generate solutions and recommendations to improving health and wellness in tribal communities. Although there is still work to be done, the Native Youth Track helped begin a dialogue about changing health and wellness so that Tribal communities can benefit from these discussions.