



National Congress of American Indians
and
Partnership for a Drug-Free America

Meth Awareness Campaign
for Indian Country
Meth Focus Group Analysis

A Report Submitted
by the
Native Wellness Institute

“Spirituality always works for us. There’s a lot of power and energy in it.”
- Joe Garcia (Ohkay Owingeh), NCAI President, at NCAI June 2007 Convention



NCAI





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Executive Summary

Background

The Native Wellness Institute, NWI, is a national non-profit organization providing training and technical assistance to tribes and Native organizations throughout the Nation. NWI has contracted with The Partnership for a Drug-Free America to assist in the development of a national methamphetamine awareness campaign for Indian country on behalf of the National Congress of American Indians.

This report will attempt to capture the thoughts and feelings about meth from the American Indian and Alaska Native people interviewed. You will see in quotes their words as they describe their hurt and frustration associated with meth and their suggestions for hope. The information in this report can be valuable to meth prevention, intervention and treatment efforts in Native communities.

Objectives of the Research

The following are the objectives of this research project:

1. to gauge the knowledge base of general meth information from Native youth, adults and elders representing various tribal affiliations;
2. to obtain feedback from Native youth, adults and elders on the impact of meth in their tribal or urban communities;
3. to examine community and cultural strengths to address meth; and
4. to solicit media message ideas for the meth awareness campaign

Input was sought from four different major sources:

1. The NWI Meth “think tank” session including youth, adults and elders;
2. Navajo and Pueblo teens, adults and elders in New Mexico;
3. Oglala Lakota teens, adults and elders in South Dakota;
4. Alaska Native teens, adults and elders in Alaska; and
5. Native youth leaders from the National Congress of American Indians convention

Major Implications and Insights

Native people are resilient and carry the strength of our ancestors to keep moving forward. Colonization and historical trauma have greatly impacted Native communities as evident by the high rates of poverty, violence, alcoholism and drug abuse. Many tears were shared during this process as well as uncomfortable laughter when sharing about meth. A common thread among all groups was the need for messages to be positive and based in culture.

This report is full of implications and insights, the top eight being:

1. Native youth and adults have a high awareness of the impact of meth on families and communities. In some cases the young people are more knowledgeable than elders and adults.
2. Meth users in Native communities neglect and/or abandon their children, steal to support their addiction, act out in violent ways and disregard cultural norms and values- often impacting every generation in an extended family.
3. Meth dealers in Native communities, Native or non, are driven by personal economic gain and will prey on potential users’ curiosity, other current addictions and existing desire to numb out pain in order to spread meth use and their “business” in tribal communities.
4. Meth is creating a new drug culture in Native communities due to the heightened addiction rate, the rapid rate of personal, family and community destruction and the faster breakdown of traditional lifeways.
5. In spite of an often hopeless attitude on fighting drugs and alcohol, Native people remain positive and hopeful for the future generations.
6. Culture remains a resiliency factor in preventing drug use, including meth. Community healing is most successful when cultural values are at its core. “If you believe, it will work.”
7. Native youth want to spend time with their families and parents. They want parents and adults to be positive role models and to do the right thing. Youth believe they have something to say and want to be heard.
8. Tribal elected, community and cultural leaders need to be educated about the impacts of meth and encouraged to address it.



NWI Meth “Think Tank”

In mid-May 2007 NWI hosted a project launch “think tank.” The purpose of the think tank was to gain input and feedback on the focus group development process from Native experts in the field. This would include a general discussion on how meth is impacting Indian country, development of discussion guide questions, focus group development process and general input for the media campaign initiative. This creative group included: one youth representative, three elders, one former meth user (clean for 7 months) and 8 adults including former drug users from the 1970’s, former elected tribal leaders, current elected tribal leaders, a director of a tribal social service program, former Indian Health Service clinic director, university employee and consultants- all Native, representing both urban and reservation/village life, and all with many, many years of experience working with and for Native people.

“Our 15 to 17 year olds are using already. Our 7 to 8 year olds they are using.”

“Meth is a gift...it will get our people back to their ways.”

This statement is finding the positive about meth. The statement is trying to find meaning behind “everything happens for a reason” – a common belief system among all Native people. Meth as a gift means that in order to successfully combat meth, a person/family/community will have to rely on their traditions, their culture and their spirituality to overcome the challenges brought about by meth. Going back to “the ways” is the gift part. Due to colonization and the many federal Indian policies that followed, many Native people have lost their ways and knowledge of tradition and culture. It doesn’t mean that it is not there. Every community whether its reservation, village, rancheria, pueblo or urban has the wisdom keepers and keepers of the ways. Since the 1970’s there has been a huge resurgence of bringing back the traditional ways.

“Meth has a spirit. We have to pray to it, make peace with it and ask it to leave us alone.”

- spoken by mother of former meth user

Below are a summary of comments from think tank participants.

Meth Issues Issues like poverty, trauma (historical and current), depression, suicide, homicide, violence and other substances were listed as factors of meth use in Native communities with each issue having its own culture and hold on individuals, families and entire communities. These social issues, in addition to meth, often create an overwhelming sense of **hopelessness** within Native families and nations.

“We have lost souls- they need something to connect to. They always can’t relate to prevention because they don’t have that sense of belonging.”

“Don’t go into doom and gloom. Our people don’t need to hear that or see that. We live it everyday and have for the past 500 plus years- been there done that.”

“Focus on resiliency and cultural strengths- they come in many different shapes.”

*“Meth has a spirit. We have to pray to it, make peace with it and ask it to leave us alone.”
- spoken by mother of former meth user*

Youth Considerations Our youth become what their parents are. Unhealthy adults, homes and community environments create unhealthy individuals. Youth will learn best from other youth. Our young people are hurting as well from many of the issues mentioned above. They need a safe place to heal. They need positive messages. Adults need to provide that

sense of hope and examples of moving forward, being good role models.

“Our youth laughed at the Montana “Not even once” campaign (eyebrow picking and car crash commercials) however, they liked the truth.com commercials- that got their attention and they remember them.”

-Washoe youth

Adult Considerations Just like our youth, our adults need a safe place to heal. Many of our adults are filling the “void” with meth and other substances. “Learning my traditions helped me to be where I’m at today.” Adults often don’t know the specifics of meth like our youth do. They know the devastation is causes but aren’t fully aware of the facts like what its called, what it looks like, symptoms of meth use or the dangers of meth labs/homes.

“We need to help our young people break these unhealthy cycles.”

Elder Considerations

“What about our elders? We’re hurting when we see these things. When is there going to be something for the elders. Now we’re raising our grandchildren. We’re trying to put strength back in.”

-Elder in tears, raising her grandchildren because daughter is in jail due to meth use

Sometime our elders are victims of crime and abuse from family or community members doing drugs. They hold up the traditions of unconditional love and support and raise the children that are sometimes left behind. Elders often feel helpless in terms of knowing what to do and how to do it. Elders are probably the least knowledgeable of basic meth information.



Cultural Strengths We need to replace meth with something healthier- like our culture. Some suggestions included helping our people define what culture is or what “the traditional way” is or what “the traditional ways” are. Other examples included promoting language, prayer, ceremonies (all different kind including specific examples to specific tribes/areas- from naming ceremonies, to blessing ceremonies, to sundance ceremonies, to sweat lodge ceremonies to rites of passage ceremonies, etc), potlatches, hand/stick game, singing, dancing and storytelling. More contemporary and “pan-Indian” or inter-tribal celebrations would be the pow wow and other social Native gatherings like traditional games, peon games and camps.

Cultural strengths as resiliency factors are so important because there are thousands of teachings within every example. The core teachings are about respecting your mind, body, spirit and all living things. With this as the core teaching, one would never put a harmful substance into their body, such as meth.

Key cultural strength words include: **Respect. Ancestors. Honor. Wisdom. Pride. Vision. Power. Love. Excellence. Courage. Spirit. Values. Belief. Family. Sacred. Traditions.**

These words are fairly universal for all Native people. The reverence for ancestors is an attention-getter due to the fact that through our oral traditions we acknowledge those that came before us. We highly respect them for keeping the traditions alive without writing them down and for their resiliency of living hard

lives and thriving, even through adverse times like colonization. Because of them, we are still here! We have the same responsibility and obligation to our future generations.

Other strengths It is said that Native people live in two worlds. One world is our Native world where we learn about culture and the traditional way of life. Traditionally, we were taught “how to live” versus today’s society where we are taught “how to make a living.” The other world is the dominant society or “white mans world” where we have to operate in a different value system, live by clocks, shuffle paper and try to find some balance and order between the two.

There are strengths in this other world too. Some of those include: sports/athletics, positive role models, families and elders. Some believe that basketball is a cultural activity!

For positive behavior change, you have to make the heart and head connection. You have to educate people in the head, but make them feel it in the heart to inspire and motivate them to make positive choices and decisions.

Summary A consistent theme with adults and youth is the need for positive messages, focusing on culture as a resiliency factor. This, in part, is due to the often negative day-to-day life that so many of our people live in. Contemporary messages include positive role models and sports/athletics. There needs to be education on meth with a unique way of combining meth education and promoting culture as a protective factor.



Focus Group Summaries

Southwest- Navajo

Elders The majority of the Southwest elders spoke only their language and didn't know a lot of facts about meth. They stated alcohol and alcoholism is what plagues their families and communities and the troubles associated with that- elder abuse, neglect of children, DWT's and domestic violence. They mentioned drugs as a catch-all term and listed marijuana, cocaine and meth as what they see or hear people using today. The problems are worse today than in years past. Cultural strengths include Navajo ceremonials, Navajo language and family/grandparents/parents and children. Many commented on one's belief in spirituality as the first step for positive outcomes. Influences would be the President of the Navajo Nation, Miss Navajo Nation, youth talking to youth.

Adults Challenges or problems facing their community include bullying, gangs, mental violence, poverty and broken families. Some families are broke apart by employment where one or both parents have to travel hundreds of miles a day to get to work and then back, cutting down on the time spent with children and communication. Alcohol remains the biggest substance problem with marijuana and cocaine use as well. In the past three years there has been a shift to meth, especially around the I-40 corridor and the central "hubs" on the reservation like WindowRock, Chinle and ShipRock. It becomes an economic issue because the dealers make so much money and then they often start using it too. Curiosity and availability are what perhaps start some use and escaping life's stress or serving to self medicate is what is appealing to other users. Cultural and other strengths include family- relationship between parent and child, Navajo culture and philosophy and ceremony. Comments on a person's belief system in spirituality were again shared.

"It really works if you believe in it."

Female Teens At first the girls were protective and not fully sharing issues facing their communities. They listed homework, drama, gossip, alcohol and backstabbing as some of their life stressors. They didn't think any substances were impacting their home communities but talked how marijuana on their school campus is a big problem with some cocaine and meth use on campus. The appeal of meth included to be cool, trying something new and the curiosity of it and also to escape stress and life pressures. Three girls knew teens who had quit meth, including one teen in the group. The girls were very open to talking to others about their problems. Strengths included sports, family and thinking positive. Cultural strengths included praying, medicine people, Native American Church and other ceremonies.

Male Teens Their life stressors included girlfriends, homework/school, gangs and life in general. They deal with stress by playing sports, games and other physical activities. People dieing, being kicked out of school and families breaking apart are effects of drug and alcohol use. Some of the problems they see from meth are violence, no jobs, failed relationships and anti-social behavior. They know a lot about meth. Stupid and stressed out people use meth. Their strengths include football, family, rodeo and school. Cultural strengths include prayer, meditation, sweats and Christianity.

Southwest- Pueblo

Adults Alcohol and drugs are problems in many of the pueblo villages. Teen brains are not fully developed until about age 24, and because of the environmental exposure to drugs and alcohol at a young age, we need to start our prevention messages early. People who are bored, idle, no self esteem or no work use meth. They didn't know too much about meth but saw it or busts on TV. Our people need a sense of belonging, to know we are a





part of something bigger. “We have to learn about who we are.” Most meth users started with alcohol then moved to marijuana before using meth.

After the focus group a mother approached the facilitator to share that her son had died from meth three months prior. She was very knowledgeable about meth in the session but did not disclose that to the large group.

Female Teens The stressors in their lives include school, money, family/friend problems, fighting and violence from drinking. They deal with stress by talking about it. Alcohol, drugs, divorce, marijuana, cocaine and meth are all problems their villages face. Meth is being used by adults. It's not at school although alcohol and marijuana are. People use meth to escape their reality and to cope. Strengths include sports, family, culture and shopping. Cultural strengths include storytelling and traditional dances like Buffalo and Butterfly.

Male Teens The stressors young men face are alcohol, a variety of drug use including meth, teen pregnancy, overdose, suicide/depression, anxiety, violence, diabetes and gangs. They deal with their problems by fighting, drinking, talking, reading, music and by making up their own solutions. They knew a lot about meth - symptoms, selling/buying, manufacturing, social problems it causes. They stated junkies and troubled, divorced, depressed and confused people use. It causes death, family breakups, violence, addiction, cultural loss and letting down your community. Strengths included family, religion/spirituality and hobbies as well as cultural strengths of planting, snake, corn and buffalo dances and music and hiking. A handful of the young men were very vocal and opinionated on many things including media messages. Below are several quotes summing up their input:

“Using their traditions and language as an example of what they'll lose, seeing that most traditions are disappearing makes them aware they're a part of a small group on this continent. They are a part of a people that have been here for centuries...our traditions are what keeps us strong and on this earth.”

“Looking back, our people were a proud nation and how others have come into our country and divided us...just being in their face and falling into the crowd...are we the proud people we once were?”

South Dakota — Oglala Lakota (Oglala Sioux Tribe)

Adults The biggest community problems were jobs, lack of them, and substance abuse -alcohol and all sorts of drugs including crystal meth. Adults talked of young people already in trouble, getting into drugs and the social ills resulting from that-stealing, violence, staying up all night and sleeping all day, babies having babies and lack of safety. They knew about meth and the destruction it causes families and communities. The adults talked a lot about negative forces and things in the community from tribal council to police to youth. They seemed very overwhelmed and hopeless at times, much pain and heaviness in the session. Poverty and lack of trust in the police was a main theme. It took them a while to brainstorm strengths and media messages.



Cultural strengths included ancestors, prayer, spirituality and ceremony.

Elders “It's a serious problem, we love our children, they're our most precious gifts from god, creator, if they just sit here idle doing nothing our grandchildren and the next generation there won't be any of that because the meth is killing everything inside of their body. Its really serious on our reservation, the Wasichus (white people) do everything. How can we stop it? Get them all off the reservation. Some tribes, they get the whole family. But now, we have no action. We're going to keep losing our children, great grandchildren and grandchildren.” The elders stated how alcohol is impacting the community but stated drugs are the worst- meth, marijuana and cocaine, and how it affects entire families. Poverty is huge and a main reason for dealing. You can't get rid of dealers because one gets put in jail and another pops up. Police corruption and no trust in them was also an issue. In terms of strengths, one elder summed it up:

“Oh, that's simple: I can name everyone in there that go to OUR church: meaning our sweatlodge. Takashala (Creator) listens to us and takes care of us. We pray to him. None of us have nothing, no money. But we're taken care of. We have medicine for these sickness. We have ceremony. That's where we get our strength. Other than that, it's not alcohol and drugs.”

Female Teens Stressor affecting them included fighting, violence, alcohol, gangs and drugs. All of the girls agreed that meth was a problem on the reservation and could easily list the problems it causes- breakdown of families, violence, stealing, how it affects the children. Some knew who the dealers were and some not. Many said they didn't know much about meth, although they saw posters at school. Some were very knowledgeable down to the color and how to smoke it. Only three girls said they have some access to the internet. Only one girl has a “my space.” The girls were very quiet in the large group so broken up into smaller groups. Strengths include culture, sports, school, family/grandparents and cultural strengths included language, land (Badlands and certain sacred sites), ceremonies and prayer/spirituality.



Male Teens The young men listed police harassment, no jobs or transportation to work (they get around on bike or horseback), violence, alcohol, drugs and nothing to do as stressors. “A child trying to find something to do around here always ends up getting in trouble.” They listed alcohol, marijuana and meth as substance problems in the community. They all knew who drug dealers were- they said there is not a meth problem now because everyone got put in jail. Yet they talked about the social ills of the impacts- how it affects families and children. In terms of strengths: “Sweats- I started singing, learning the ways instead of living the gangster life, it’s for our people.” They had other strengths as well, both traditional and contemporary- sports, school, grandparents, land.

Alaska Natives

Elders The elder was based in Anchorage but grew up in the village and commutes back and forth between Anchorage and the village. Alcohol is a huge problem in the village. Drugs are too, mainly marijuana and cocaine but alcohol by far is a worse problem. Meth hasn’t seemed to reach the villages in a devastating way yet as alcohol, but the modes of getting it there are in place as are the social conditions. Alaska Natives need to take baby steps in order for positive change because the alcohol and drug use has been around for so long. People have to first accept their problems/addictions and then move forward. A strong sense of family and caring for the children was mentioned. Church was cited as a cultural strength as well as culture and especially subsistence activities. “When subsistence activities are going on (hunting, whaling, fishing, etc) nobody drinks.” In terms of messages:

Adults Participants included a good representation of most every tribal group in Alaska and both village and urban representation. There was a long discussion on communication problems between the generations- adults, youth and elders. “We have elders coming saying you have to respect me because I’m an elder. If you teach the children that they will. . .but we have elders boot legging, manufacturing drugs, etc and they don’t deserve our

respect.” Alcohol and drug problems were listed, stating that older people seem to drink and the younger generations are using drugs. People in the villages are turning to drugs because it’s easier to get due to the ban on alcohol. Part of the difficulties in the village is the changing value system and other things have impacted the real values and now they are in conflict. Whatever the strengths were that kept the people safe and whole for untold generations, are changing. Not too many specifics were given when asked what they knew about meth. Most information came from TV. Marijuana is common but meth is getting just as common. Violence, broken families, sexual assault, anger, crime and grandparents raising grandchildren are some of the ways meth is impacting communities. Strengths included personal strength, sports, being proactive and identity.

“The Native young people are far more advanced in destructive behaviors and if we keep losing ourselves to outside influences it will be even more devastating. Re-teaching basic values: hard work, respect, manners and if they move into a new environment they won’t have those basic values and can be easily influenced, maybe they will be resistant to external forces if they know who they are.”

“When I was in high school there was Native pictures and I was proud that some Native student was playing ball and was doing something positive and made me think of what I could do.”

This young man was referring to a poster he saw hanging on a wall at his high school. The poster displayed a picture of young Native athlete with a brief narrative on how he was living a healthy lifestyle and doing something positive like playing basketball.

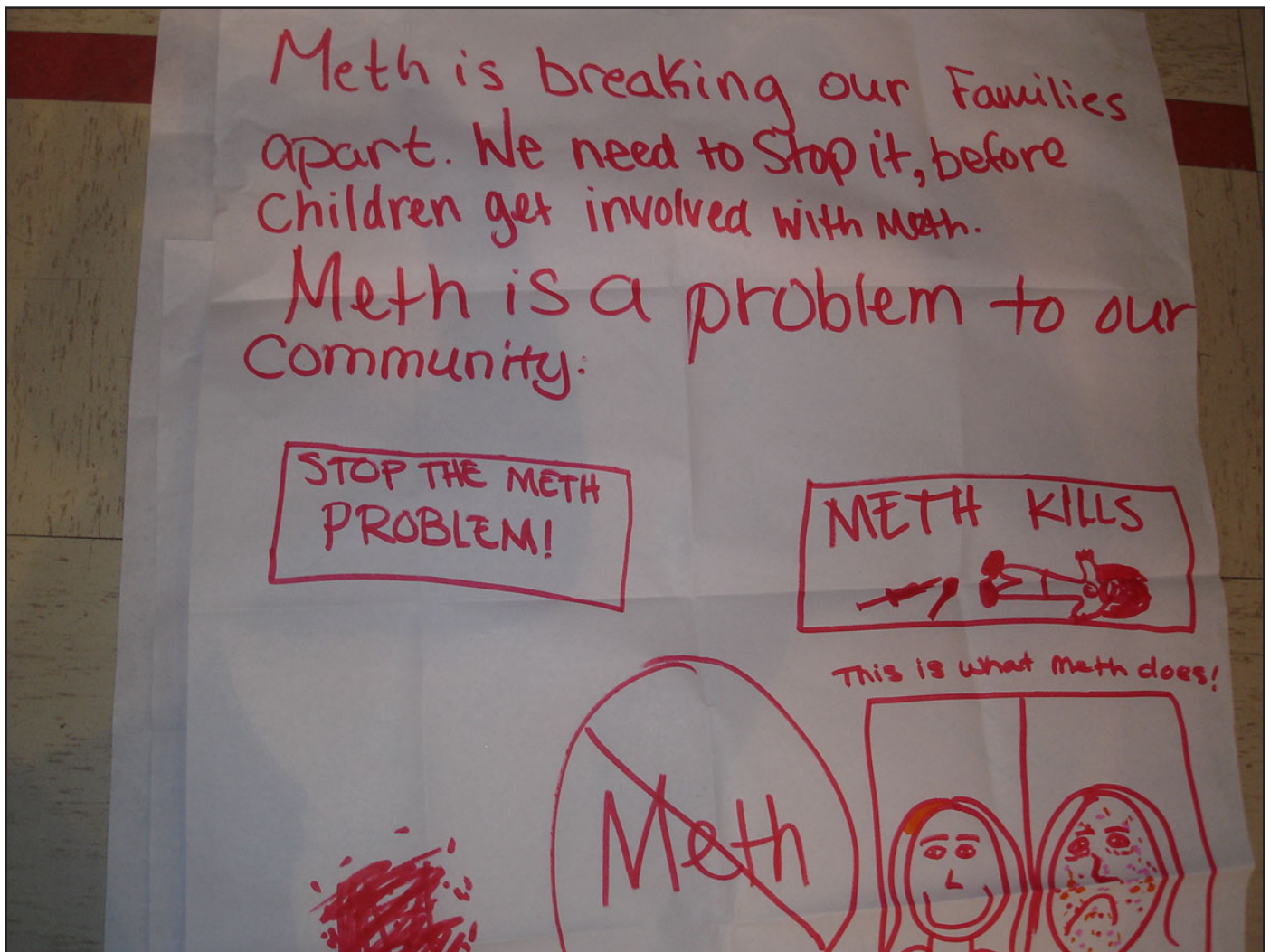
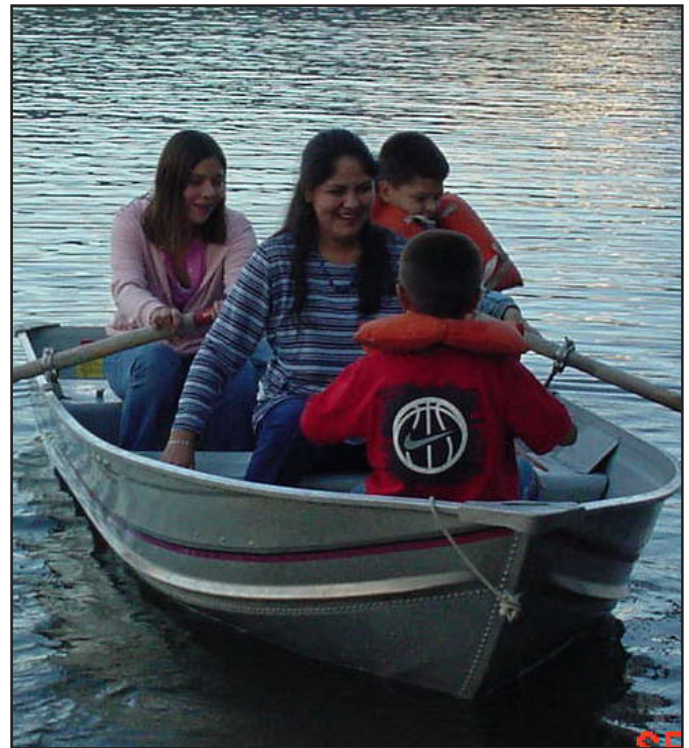
Male/Female Teens Each of the four youth represented in this group were urban-based with no village experience. Their parents had village experience though. Their stressors were about family life, including drinking parents, employment and what to do with their lives/future. Most thought alcohol was a way of life until they learned differently. One youth was very knowledgeable of drug use. Alcohol, marijuana and cocaine are bad in town but also in the village. Meth could be easily accessed





in town. They emphasized that anyone could get it. They felt people did meth to escape reality or because of a lack of parental discipline. Strengths included sports, entertainment and activities for youth. When asked about cultural strengths they said the role model of a Native person in the NBA or Natives in high positions. There was one mention of culture.

Summary Substance abuse, including meth, is greatly impacting Native communities. There are many examples of the negative impacts to families and communities. Meth does not only affect the individual. There is an underlying theme of hopelessness and/or helplessness in terms of knowing what to do which suggests a need/opportunity for personal empowerment. Given this, a media campaign needs to focus on attainable suggestions. Messages need to be positive and encouraging and educate on the specifics of meth. Youth mentioned sports and other activities more than adults and elders but still felt strongly about culture and spirituality and the need for those messages too. The main messages that were suggested include educating about meth and promoting culture. Promotion of sports and other “mainstream” activities were seen as important and relevant as well. In terms of what terminology to use, “Native” seemed to be the most acceptable.





Implications and Insights

What message would you give adults?

The strongest message from the youth to adults was in regard to parents. They wanted parental involvement. They want their parents to be good role models and are very disturbed when their parent uses drugs and alcohol. Parents or adults often mentioned that the youth were distant and disrespectful. There is most likely some correlation between the youths' anger and their disappointment in their parents and other adults. The main messages adults should hear are:

- Parents: Communicate with your children.
- Children want family time and attention.
- There is hope.
- Be a role model.
- Youth expect you to walk your talk.
- Your children are watching you.
- All adults are responsible for protecting the community's children.
- Leaders need to stand up and do the right thing.

In terms of taking action, any kind of movement needs to come from the people. If you start advertising it, it comes off as "hey, we're telling you what to do" and our people have had enough of that. Taking action means talking about it, telling kids about it. That's the only kind of action that is needed. Taking out meth labs, etc you're asking people to make judgment, arrest family members, etc... and it may come off as too radical and/or militant. Most adults and elders mentioned the need to get rid of meth labs/dealers but also expressed "there's nothing we can do about it" kind of attitude. The campaign needs to focus more on personal empowerment and smaller steps that people can accept and handle.

For example, what you can do for yourself and your family. Almost like a "how to" concept- how to be a better person, how to have a healthy family, how to communicate, how can you be spiritual, how can you promote your culture.

Other messages to adults would seem to focus on three things:

- Quit ignoring the drug/meth problem and do something about it
- Quit talking about how important youth are and do something to make their futures brighter
- Be better role models

What message would you give youth?

The most striking element about the youth responses is their honesty. They talked about their own drug use but also about the drug use they see in the community. They are very, very aware of what is going on in the community. Unfortunately, they are so influenced by it, their attitude is "If we can't beat them, we might as well join them." They are angry with the adults and there is a real sense of hopelessness and emotional pain. At the same time, the youth desired better relationships with their family and parents.

Youth said grandparents are a great influence and important.

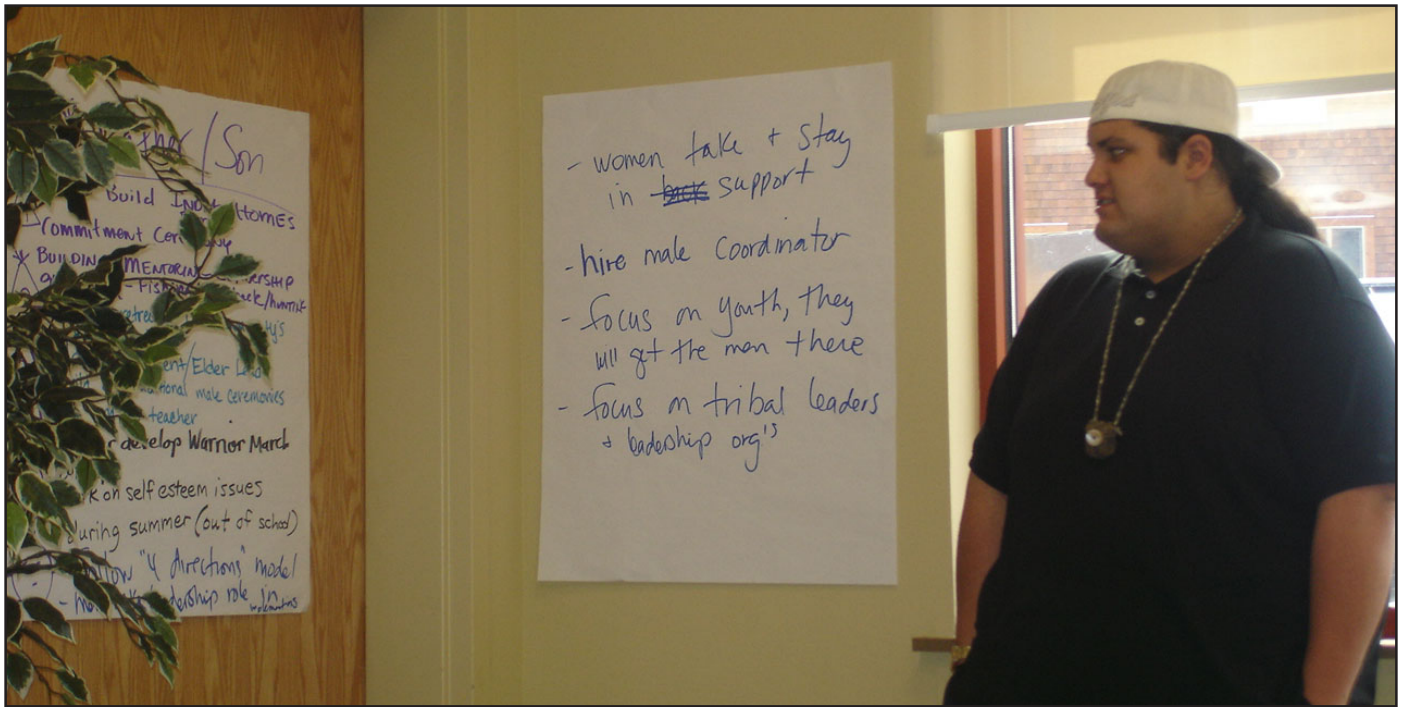
- Youth said grandparents are a great influence and important.
- They know it is important to change and to change their attitude, but they don't know how, they lack the skills.
- There is hope.
- This anti-meth message stood out: "You may lose a lot; even me." (Lakota youth)
- Youth are not naïve. Saying "don't do it" or "just say no" doesn't work.

The message for youth would seem to go in two different directions. Some think the anti-drug message needs to be in your face with shock value to get the youth to notice, while others think it has to be more focused on alternatives of what young people could be doing instead. There didn't seem to be a clear majority of either school of thought. Mixed in these thoughts was also the need/want for cultural pride messages that are positive.

The youth messages definitely need to be given to youth by youth. Youth have power and impact with adults as well so a youth-specific print ad would impact adults and elders too. A creative combination of meth education information and promoting cultural and/or alternative (sports, etc) activities is what is needed.

If you were going to give a cultural strength message to all of Indian country what would that message be?

Culture was cited very strongly in the focus group responses. Elements of culture that was thought to help were values such as respect and family unity. Subsistence, hunting, gathering, camping, and other cultural activities were important. Powwows, basketball (truly a Native cultural activity), ceremonies, church, were also cited



as important. But the most important cultural strength that seemed to come up was the importance of family and family support. Spirituality was also considered very important.

Impressions from the focus groups and seemingly reinforced by the notes from all of the groups, is many believe that all Native people (young and old) would be more resistant to using drugs, and more likely to stop using drugs, if they were more deeply involved in their cultural activities and way of life. Most of this seemed to revolve around fighting a feeling of being disconnected or along by teaching and practicing that they are a part of something special, something they were born into.

An interesting common theme from the various regions was the **belief** in the spiritual and cultural ways. "If you believe it will work."

- Everyone felt culture was very important.
- Someone said they throw rocks to stay calm and peaceful. That is a strong image in my mind. Or reading. Or talking to a parent or friend.
- Medicine men and ceremonies can be helpful.
- It is evident in the focus groups that individuals value spirituality at a very high level.

What were some of the similarities and differences between the ages: elders, adults and youth?

There were many similarities between the ages. This reflects the tight-knit communities where most of the respondents live. Most everyone cited the same kind of community ills and problems, but also cited similar solutions. Despite the similarities, however, youth and adults/elders were critical of one another.

- They could identify the signs of meth. Even the youth could do it.
- They felt drugs and alcohol were the biggest problems.
- Youth say their parents drink and use.
- They felt positive messages were most important.
- All were able to identify the social ills of the community: high unemployment, drugs, alcohol, suicide, violence, divorce, drop-out, murder, isolation, low educational achievement, driving while high, sexual assault, health problems, depression, diabetes, domestic violence, gangs, teen pregnancy, no parenting skills, loss of language and culture, legal problems, jail, vandalism, stealing, lack of pride.
- Generally, when asked specifically about strengths, youth did not cite "parents" but in other questions they expressed their desire for more involvement with parents. They see parents as a solution.
- Youth felt their friends were the easiest to talk to.
- Youth felt having more activities would keep them off drugs.
- It was usually difficult for everyone to come up with a positive message or ad for meth. They reverted to the popular campaign that shows the physical effects of meth.
- Generally cited hobbies and sports as potential solutions.
- The Lakota adults had a difficult time citing strengths when asked specifically about them, but had no problem citing the negative things in the community.
- Lakota felt law enforcement is corrupt.
- Lakota was probably more culturally intact than others: language, access to elders, ceremonies. "Our ancestors didn't use meth so why should you?"
- Lakota very proactive and had a meth awareness day at high school.



- Adults and elders cited a lack of respect from youth, to the point of abuse.
- There were differences cited regarding technology: iPods, the internet, etc.
- Youth say they want the adults to talk to them but the adults say the youth distance themselves. There is a disconnect.

There appears to be general knowledge of meth from all of the age groups, but little detail on the knowledge of how the drug works, how the drug is sold or how it takes root in a community, but all of the age groups seemed acutely aware of how it is impacting their families and communities. Comments were made that the elders were much less knowledgeable about it, simply because they aren't in those circles and the younger people are out and about in the community so much more.

What were some of the similarities and differences between areas? (Southwest, Plains and Alaska)

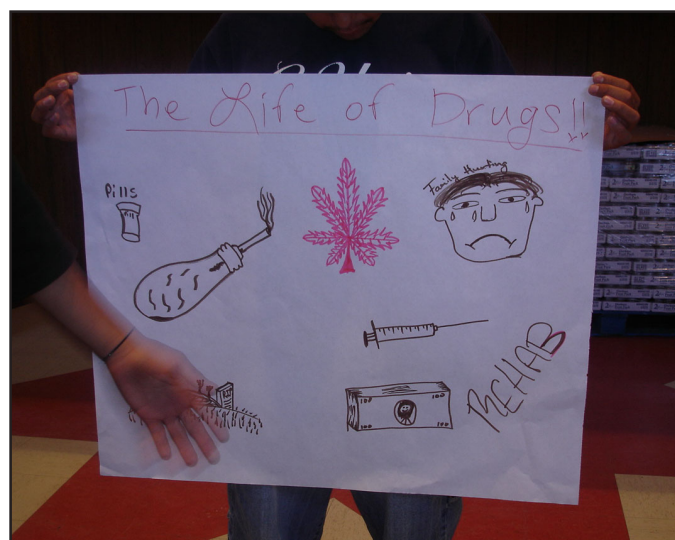
Although there were many similarities, there were some differences. These were primarily due to the geographic region and cultural backgrounds of the separate focus group respondents. Probably the most stark differences were that of the Alaska Natives from everyone else, due to geographic and climactic isolation. In fact, the Alaska Natives were the ones who cited the importance of any ad campaign specifically reflecting them, that an Inupiaq face was distinguishable from a Tlingit face.

It appears that meth isn't the same kind of problem in the Native villages of Alaska as it is in the lower 48. Cocaine and marijuana seem to be much larger drug problems, but still dwarfed by the rampant alcoholism which has existed in many of those villages for generations already.

"I don't know why my dad drank. He just always did. And so did his dad. They just didn't drink, they drank to get drunk."

-Alaska Native elder

- Everyone knows someone on meth.
- Many similarities.
- Meth is prevalent.
- People seem to know its effects.
- Many know that you can make it from household products. Social ills are the same everywhere. One person said, "If you can make a cake, you can make [meth]."
- Family and parental support and involvement is cited as a solution to the meth problem.
- They were able to identify that life is harder now, there are more drugs and problems than there used to be, and less focus on culture than there used to be.
- Everyone suggested positive messages are the most important, that if you reinforce the negative, you will get the negative.



- It was often stated that sending people to treatment doesn't work because they come back to the community and just start using again.
- And suicide is rampant.
- People were very forthright with their comments. One woman talked about being raped. This kind of disclosure can be a strength and should be incorporated into the campaign somehow.
- There is an element of pain in much of what was said. You can hear it in their words.
- There is a general sense of hopelessness in many of the responses.
- Alaskans cited moving into the city and getting adjusted as a big problem.
- Meth has made it to the far reaches, including Barrow.
- There is a feeling in Alaska that meth is just starting to reach them. They are getting it all the way from Mexico. And the winters are not a deterrent.
- Subsistence in Alaska is a source of strength.
- No one really trusts leaders or law enforcement.
- Alaska stated that none of the messages so far have worked. They need something new.
- Solution starts with the family.
- Youth would encourage their peers to stop but are also real about it. They realize they can't stop someone if they're going to do it.
- Alaska adults cited a lack of services in comparison to other places.
- Suicide is a huge problem in Alaska.
- AK cited shift in values away from traditional ones as a negative.
- Going village to village, and the churches are involved.
- Alaska adults cited loss of identity and village displacement.



Other observations/suggestions.

One primary observation is that everyone knows about meth. Even when respondents said they didn't know about it they started stating facts. Everyone knows something about meth whether its ingredients, physical appearances or affects on the family and community. Many people have personal experiences with it, either themselves or in a family member. They see the effects and know how it's made. We know far too much about it. Perhaps a campaign related to the "type of education" we are getting. When asked where one gets meth, one respondent said "Under the kitchen sink." This is a very sad commentary on the knowledge about meth and its accessibility.

Also, the high level of sadness and pain within the comments was very evident. The respondents seemed to talk about things with no problem. Rape, violence, drug addiction, lack of parental involvement, all of these very painful things was easily identified as issues. There is a high level of awareness already in our communities. Again, the type of education our people are getting is unfortunate.

As for the type of message that might be helpful, the responses were interesting because respondents seemed to have a very difficult time coming up with ideas. They either drew on ideas already tried or the discussion fell silent sooner than other parts of the focus groups. This may be due to the hopelessness and/or the level of acceptance that meth is just a part of life and they're not going to get rid of it. Sometimes, this was stated.

Above are quotes and bullets of statements that stood out and that could be used in a campaign. Respondents seemed to think video and radio would be a good format. They often suggested showing the before and after pictures of someone on meth. I would not take this tact, since it has already been done. We can still

educate on meth without showing the faces. Years ago there was an FAS campaign with pictures of Native babies and it soon labeled our community as a community of drinking mothers and FAS babies. Many of the respondents suggested a more positive campaign. This could possibly focus on family unity and/or cultural strengths.

We were awestruck by the sad information these focus groups have revealed. It demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive and multi-level prevention campaign within communities that addresses the cultural and regional aspects of the people. There must also be an effort to work with tribal leaders, health officials, funders, community members, policymakers, and others to address this serious problem in Indian Country. Further analysis and the development of action steps from this information would be a useful addition to NCAI's meth tool kit.

We applaud the efforts of the National Congress of American Indians and the Partnership for a Drug-Free America for taking action and attempting to make a difference in Indian country! The Native Wellness Institute is honored to be a part of the solution and this process.

"We are all here because of the love for our people."
-Edward Itta, Native mayor of Barron, AK



Respectfully submitted,
Jillene Joseph (Gros Ventre),
Executive Director
Native Wellness Institute
www.nativewellness.com

On behalf of our staff, board of directors and the people and communities involved in this process



During the focus group process participants were asked for their input on media ideas for the campaign. Their suggestions are included here as additional information, inspiration and ideas for communities doing grass-root meth prevention efforts in their communities.

“It all comes to visual, being able to catch that attention. . . when you see young Native people it catches the attention of both adults and youth. For example, on My Space, youth have a trained eye to only focus on pictures of other youth. If you have one campaign for everybody, focus on youth.”

- The eagle feather is probably one of the universal symbols as is the circle/hoop.
- Media messages should be combined with meth info and promoting cultural strengths
- A series of poster/brochures depicting both traditional and contemporary images with the same message
- UNITY did a campaign about ten years ago on living healthy lifestyles that had pictures of Native youth on them, a series of posters, some with contemporary clothes or athletic dress and traditional dress with a short bio about them being successful- whenever our youth looked at it they would study it and want a copy of it. Those were the posters we hung in our offices and that's what you want- something that people are going to want to hang up or to grab the brochure and read it.
- What about a poster of someone who speaks the language, has a degree, etc..and the last line is something like "is drug and alcohol free. See, not everyone is doing it."
- Slogan: Say KNOW to meth: Know your language. Know your songs. Know your traditions.
- Don't meth with my village
- Don't meth with my rez
- The messages have to be regional. "You can't have a Navajo telling the Plains Indians what to do."
- Keep it simple

For the print messages also include template screens for t-shirts or templates for bumper stickers or fridge magnets, etc. The Partnership or NCAI may not have the funding to print and disseminate these items but tribal and urban programs may have the budgets to print these items if the templates are available. These could be offered online, as part of NCAI's meth toolkit, part of the national dissemination efforts, etc.





NCAI Teens The NCAI youth leaders have discussed in length how meth is impacting Native communities in prior work sessions. The focus of this discussion was to get their feedback on the media campaign itself. Their ideas include:

In terms of media campaigns, what doesn't work:

- “don’t do drugs”
- Celebrity endorsements
- Authority messages
- Just saying don’t do it
- Everything right now
- The fact that one hit can kill you
- Try it and you die
- Sound fake, like you don’t care or its not real
- No big celebrities just real people
- Cheery music
- Talking down instead of talking to you
- No compassion
- Coming from law enforcement
- Show, don’t tell why

What works:

- Peer messages
- Truth.com works because it has teens talking to teens and its real

What are the messages you want young people to hear that you think will have meaning- slogan, tag lines, etc...

- If its Indians talking to Indians it makes a difference, its better
- I think focusing on Native youth you’re looking at a whole different perspective
- Remember that your role in the tribe affects everyone else, having that community impact and realizing your role
- We have universal similarities with our values but we also have tribal specific values that reflect the way we were raised and our specific tribe
- I think universal is more effective because maybe you’ll impact other races

An interesting poster idea from the NCAI youth:

Show a Native person in their traditional regalia or singing at a drum and then show another picture with their regalia all torn and tattered as a way to show Native pride through the first picture and absolute disrespect to your person, culture, way of life and ancestors by doing meth and causing you, your culture and family to be torn and tattered.

Additional messages from focus group areas

Southwest- Navajo

Adults/Elders

- Messages must be positive. “Even children these days, if they see something on TV, an eagle feather, etc, they’ll stop and listen. They’re seeing hope.”

Youth

- Messages include keeping hope alive, be strong, get help, keep families together and more family together time.
- Media messages: “it will kill you.” “it’s bad for you.” “play sports.”

Southwest – Pueblo

Adults/Elders

- For messages: Use a former user and show how it impacted their life.

“Something that is proactive. Positive messages...a lot of proverbs that are written out. Positive messages that need to get out that already exist. Its good to know about meth...but we need to get out the positive messages and how good it is to be who you are. Focus on the strengths. Keep giving positive messages. Young people, they know all about drugs. They like that when you let them know about who they are. A lot of them don’t know who they are but they like hearing about it and the language, they like hearing that. Positive peer pressure. Having an elder and young person giving these messages. Giving young people an opportunity to give a positive message. Its going to empower them too. We’re capable of giving the message too.”

Youth

- For media messages show someone using and how it affects them. Have youth speaking for radio PSAs. M= motivation; E= Education; T= Tradition; H= Health.
- “If I choose one message what would I put: culture”

South Dakota – Oglala Lakota

Adults/Elders

- Media messages included:

“Picture of a male and female, handsome, and then have a skull over here...and show meth is not our tradition. It was not and did not belong to our ancestors so why should it belong to you.”

“Show a meth user, before and after, a message of keep our traditions alive...a picture of a Native”

“Promote positivity”

“There’s more to life than meth”

“A picture of a woman with her kids enjoying the scenery”



“Meth why? Its not our way of life, we need something to believe in

Show all the chemicals...and say why this? When you have all the culture stuff over here”

Youth

- Media messages included:

“meth is breaking our families apart. We need to stop it before children (younger than the teens involved in the focus groups) get involved with meth. Meth is a problem to our community.”

“Stop the meth problem. Meth kills. (before and after pics)”

They felt before and after pictures would make people look.

Alaska Natives

Adults/Elders

“None of the messages have worked...so they need to come up with new messages.

We can't just point the finger, the more you do that you're going to make them use more.

There needs to be a kinder, gentle way to address these issues. Take away the shame. Don't focus on that.”

They remembered smoking ads and felt meth campaigns should be graphic, real and show meth users but be positive. “in one word: respect.”

