



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

POLICY RESEARCH CENTER

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Greetings to our partners! This is your latest update from the NCAI Policy Research Center, which shares recent studies, information on research forums, and PRC initiatives. An electronic copy is available to share on our website: www.ncai.org/PRC.



An Interview Dr. Teresa LaFromboise

Originator of the *American Indian Life Skills Curriculum* for Native Youth Resiliency

This month, the PRC wanted share insights into one of the nation's only evidence-based programs¹ specifically tailored to American Indian and Alaska Native behavioral health interventions.

What are the foundations of the American Indian Life Skills (AILS) Curriculum?

As the name implies, the program uses a strengths-based approach to building life skills in the youth participants. I designed, developed, and evaluated the program with the help and participation of students and community members from the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico and the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma—finally publishing the curriculum in 1996. While the curriculum was designed to protect high school youth against the threat of suicide ideation and completion, the approach relies on the positive construction and fostering of important, everyday skills that allow a person to successfully navigate his or her world. The curriculum helps to teach and/or re-enforce communications skills, problem solving, stress management, anger regulation and goal setting. The program also raises awareness of suicide ideation and the help-seeking behaviors that can prevent suicide.

How is this curriculum unique from others?

The AILS curriculum stands out from many other strengths based youth programs for its emphasis on and incorporation of culture. Cultural references, understanding and supports are woven into the intervention's seven main strands, which include: building self-esteem; identifying emotions and stress; increasing communication and problem-solving skills; recognizing self-destructive behavior and replacing it with positive strategies; learning information about suicide; helping a suicidal peer get help; and envisioning and planning for a positive future. By drawing upon and incorporating culture, teachers (and others implementing the program) build trust with students, tap into existing sources of strength and pride, and help students think through and practice problem solving with examples and role play that reflect situations they are likely to encounter.

¹ According to SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-Based Practices and Programs.

The AILS curriculum stands out for another reason – it is one of only a handful of interventions designed for Native youth, rigorously evaluated, and found to be effective for Native youth. In short, it is one of the few American Indian / Alaska Native interventions to be recognized as “evidence- based.”

How does the curriculum effect behavioral change?

Students learn and practice a range of psychosocial skills that allow them to effectively work through and overcome the challenges of everyday life. Through examples, discussion and role play they learn to identify emotions, practice problem solving, and regulate their responses. By working on and improving these skills, students are able to decrease feelings of depression, hopelessness, anger, and anxiety while increasing positive thinking and resilience to stress and stressful events. The curriculum enhances the peer- to- peer support skills of youth; youth practice how to listen to people, how to ask good questions, and how to study each other’s non-verbal behavior. We know youth will talk to each other before talking to a parent or teacher.

How did you assess your outcomes and what were they?

Assessment of the effectiveness of the intervention included: student’s self-report of risk factors, observations of the life skills taught as part of the curriculum, and peer ratings of a student’s life skills related to suicide intervention and help seeking. Those participating in the AILS program reported lower levels of hopelessness, suicidal ideation and attempts, along with improved ability to manage anger and assist peers in problem- solving and help seeking behaviors.

Has the curriculum been adapted to other settings? How do you plan to expand upon these successes?

We have adapted the AILS curriculum for use in a middle school setting. This adaptation holds tremendous potential to reach children at a point in their lives when they may first encounter difficult and stressful situations involving drugs and alcohol, sexual activity, and bullying. By this age, many youth have already encountered the loss of a loved one either through death or divorce.

Many tribes are interested in implementing the AILS curriculum for their middle school students. When they think about doing the evaluation, however, they get concerned because they believe it will be more complicated and expensive. On the other hand, having a comprehensive evaluation will ensure that the program is adjusted in a way that will increase its effectiveness and the benefit to the community. That evaluation can also provide valuable information for other programs and initiatives.

Teresa LaFromboise, PhD, is a professor of development and psychological science in the graduate school of education at Stanford University. She received her doctorate in counseling psychology from the University of Oklahoma. Her research is concerned with helping ethnic minority students survive acculturation pressure, cultural adjustment, discrimination, major life transitions and other stresses that are so typical — and so often neglected — in children and adolescents.

New Resources Available

(Continue to Page 4 for the latest research reports from the PRC)

The White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education released the **Final Report on their School Environment Listening Sessions** in late last year. Their recommendations include supporting Native languages, cultural awareness, anti-bullying efforts, positive discipline, and action to change negative imagery. To

view the report and its recommendations, please visit: <http://sites.ed.gov/whiaiane/files/2015/10/school-environment-listening-sessions-final-report.pdf>.

Released in December, the **Community Safety by Design: Preventing Violence through Land Use** report explores the nexus of land use and neighborhood safety. Using the Spectrum of Prevention as a framework, it offers recommendations for creating safer communities through a deeper understanding of place and safety. To view this report, please visit: <http://preventioninstitute.org/component/jlibrary/article/id-370/127.html>.

A recently published article in the *Maternal Child Health Journal* focuses on **Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Preterm Birth Among American Indian and Alaska Native Women**. The authors suggest this disparity in birth outcomes may stem from higher levels of exposure to psychosocial, sociodemographic, and medical risk factors. The article can be accessed at: <http://bit.ly/1X9opMT>.



On the occasion of its 25th Anniversary, the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health's announced the launch of its **500 Scholars Initiative**, which will raise \$3 million over the next three years to promote education and training opportunities for 500 American Indian and Alaska Natives, through programs spanning high school to post-doctoral education.

Upcoming Research Conferences

11th Annual Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum. This year's Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum will be held in Spokane, Washington on June 29th. Our theme is "Changing Climates, Inspiring Hope: Using Research to Transform Systems." Please visit: <http://www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/initiatives/tribal-leader-scholar-forum>.

Collaborative Research Center for American Indian Health Annual Research Summit. The 4th Annual Health Research Summit will be held **March 30-31** at Cankdeska Cikana Community College in Ft. Totten, ND. CRCAIH promotes partnerships with tribal communities, research institutions, and healthcare entities around research that will improve American Indian health. For information, please visit: <http://www.crcaih.org/summit.htm>.

National Indian Child Welfare Association Conference. The 34th Annual Protecting Our Children National American Indian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect will take place in St. Paul, MN, on **April 3-6**. This year's theme is "Voices of Our Ancestors: Focusing on the Seventh Generation." Please visit: <http://www.nicwa.org/conference/>.

American Education Research Association Conference. AERA's 2016 Annual Meeting—held **April 8-12** in Washington, DC—will celebrate the aspirations that gave rise to their professional community 100 years ago: hope and determination that research can strengthen public education, society's most democratic institution.

National Indian Health Board Tribal Public Health Summit. The NIHB 2016 Tribal Public Health Summit will take place **April 11-13** in Atlanta, GA. This year's summit emphasizes achieving health equity and will be organized in four tracks: accreditation and capacity building; behavioral health and substance use; health promotion and disease prevention; and public health law and policy.

[Alaska Native Studies Conference](#). This year's conference will be held **April 14-16** in Anchorage, AK and will center on the theme, "Wellness & Healing: Indigenous Innovations & Alaska Native Research." Pre-registration begins on February 1.

26th Annual Native Health Research Conference. The Native Research Network is accepting proposals for their conference, June 5-8 in Cherokee, North Carolina. This year's theme is "Finding the Balance: Sacred Places and Healthy Environments." Please visit: <http://www.nativeresearchnetwork.org/#!nrrn-2016-conference/c1u6l>.

Funding Opportunities

[Phillips Fund for Native American Research](#). The Phillips Fund of the American Philosophical Society provides grants for research in Native American linguistics and ethnohistory, focusing on the United States and Canada. Graduate to postdoctoral researchers are eligible; applications must be received by the **March 1 deadline**.

[American Indian Education Foundation Scholarships for Graduate and Undergraduates](#). The AIEF program is one of the United States' largest grantors of scholarships to Native Americans, providing nearly \$450,000 to about 225 students each year. Please submit your scholarship application by the **April 4 deadline**.

[Judith McManus Price Scholarship](#). A scholarship administered by the American Planning Association for undergraduate and graduate planning students who intend to pursue careers as practicing planners in the public sector. Applications must be received by the **April 30 deadline**.

[Full Circle Scholarship for Undergraduate Tribal College Students](#). Each year, applications are accepted from students attending tribal colleges and universities beginning January 1 through **May 31 deadline**. The American Indian College Fund determines student eligibility and awards the scholarships.

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PROJECTS & RESOURCES

[11th Annual Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum Call for Proposals is now LIVE!](#) This year's Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum will be held in Spokane, Washington on June 29th. Our theme is "Changing Climates, Inspiring Hope: Using Research to Transform Systems." Please submit your proposals for consideration by the **February 19 deadline**.

[Fiscal Year 2017 Indian Country Budget Recommendations](#). Hot off the press is this year's budget book, titled "Upholding the Promises, Respecting Tribal Governance: For the Good of the People." Developed in coordination with tribal partners, it offers recommendations for ways the federal government, partnering with tribes, should support long-term investments in services that are foundational to the quality of life of Native Nations.

[10th Annual Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum Proceedings](#). The PRC has compiled and posted the conference materials from the Data Partners Pre-Conference, General Plenary, Poster Session, and Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum breakout sessions from this year's Mid Year Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota.

[PRC Research Update](#). If you missed our last Research Update, please take a moment to learn about ways in which you might contribute to current research, learn about new data tools and resources, and review our featured research, which centers on justice.

[A Spotlight on Two Spirit \(Native LGBT\) Communities](#). In September, the PRC shared an update highlighting the status of Native LGBT and Two Spirit communities —disseminating new data and reports that show where we are

gaining ground and where further support is needed. Please review the information we have compiled and give us feedback on how we can advance this work.

Inroads to Health: The PRC and Washington University are recruiting postdoctoral researchers to our Center for Diabetes Translation Research (CDTR), which focuses on the translation of type 2 diabetes and obesity interventions. The PRC and the Black Hills Center for American Indian Health co-direct the “Research Partnerships with American Indian/Alaska Native Communities” Core. As a member of the CDTR, you will receive support from our network of investigators with manuscripts, publications, and applying for pilot and feasibility programs.