

# Connections

An Annual Publication of  
Washington Coalition of  
Sexual Assault Programs

Volume XXVIII

2021

## Honoring First Nations:

In Their Own Words

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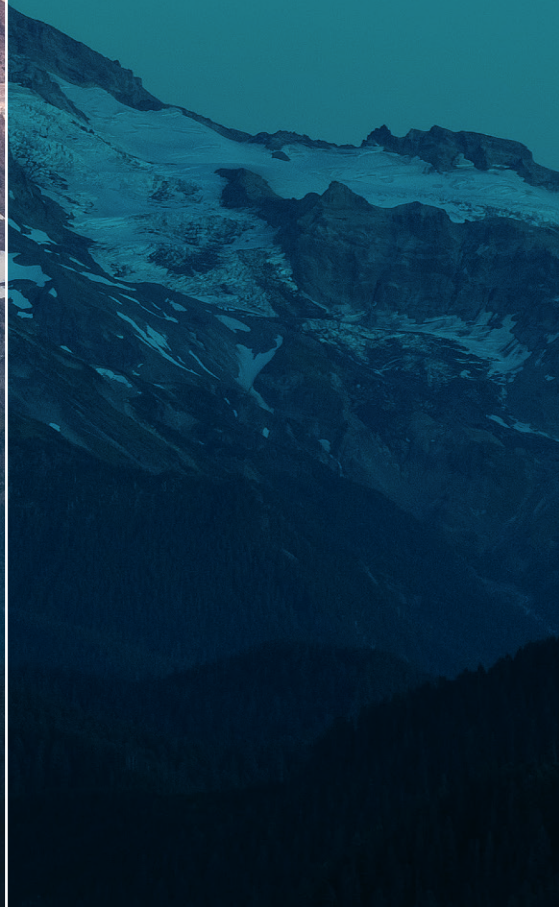
**We Survive without Justice:  
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**Native Indigenous Framework  
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in 2021**

**Advocate Spotlight:  
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**Advocate Spotlight:  
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**Question Oppression**





“Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth. It is a lovely surging.”

Toni Morrison

## Letter from the Editor

Patricia Flores (she/her/ella)  
Advocacy Coordinator/Coordinadora de Intercesión

**T**hrough my maternal grandmother, Hipolita Rivera Rocha I am a descendent of the Tarahumara/Rarámuri Tribe of Mexico. My abuelita was a Healer; I am her legacy and a Healer also.

When I first began with WCSAP, we held a Tribal Gathering in Shelton in June 2019 which was beautiful. In September 2019 my colleague Donna and I had the great opportunity through WCSAP to attend Native Wellness Institute’s training. Those four days were very rewarding, to say the least. It reminded me that centering our Indigenous ways and being together is critical to our thriving.

In December 2019, WCSAP was invited to lead an Advocate Core Training by Yakama Nation Behavioral Health (YNBH). We were honored for the request and presented to the Yakama Victim Resource Program Advocates and staff, YNBH Counselors, and Tribal Law Enforcement. We had an amazing three days of training.

What made this training so powerful for us at WCSAP? Well, for me I was able to go home, to the Yakama Reservation – Toppenish, where I was born and raised. To work with the Yakama Nation workers for three days, all of us learning from one another, and feeling the passion for advocacy was inspiring among different disciplines. I had not facilitated a training specifically with First Peoples before that date.



WCSAP has a platform to center communities, and it is with humility and gratitude that we center First Peoples in this Connections publication.

We thank each contributor for sharing their wisdom with us in these pages. I would also like to acknowledge that we have entered into our second year of COVID-19. This Pandemic has had a huge impact on all of us and Indigenous, Black, and Brown people have been hit hardest.

As we continue to work in the movement to end violence we are vulnerable and our work still continues without missing a beat. There are many lessons to be learned during this tumultuous time. One of those lessons for me is to embrace my anger; it is a sacred emotion and valid. At times I feel like I have the frustration and tolerance level of a two-year-old and that is challenging. Suspending judgement and having self-compassion is so important. I allow my anger to propel me forward in my truth.

Please continue to take good care of yourself and one another. I am honored and moved to walk on this path with each of you.

**Editor’s note:** We provided minimal editing to the pieces in this issue to ensure each author’s or interviewee’s authentic voice.



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The mission of the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs is to unite agencies engaged in the elimination of sexual violence through education, advocacy, victim services, and social change.

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Patricia Flores

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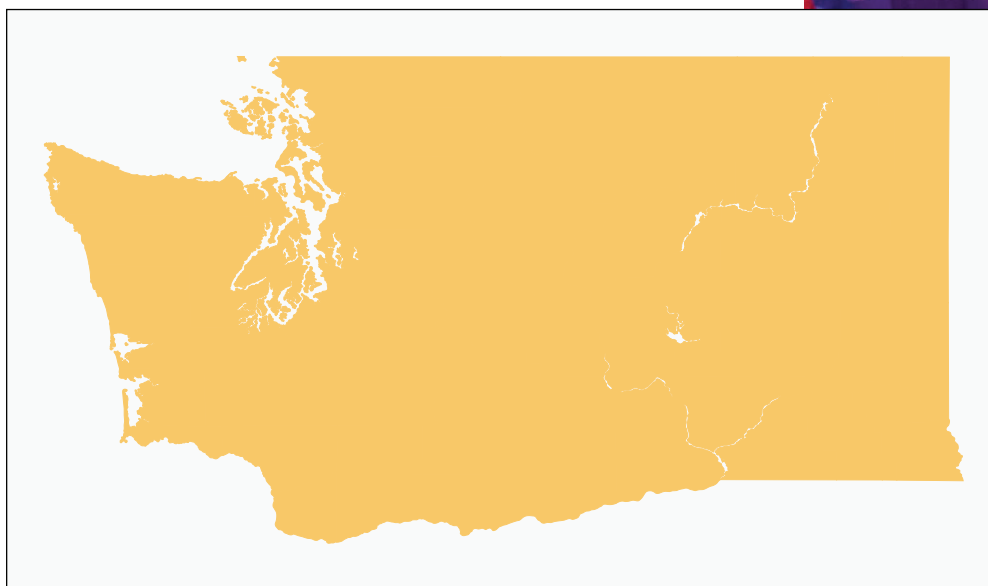
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Cover photo © Caleb Riston, Mount Rainier, Washington USA  
The northwestern slope of Mt. Rainier (also known as Tahoma or Tacoma) softly glows blue and red on a late summer evening when the mountain's ice and snow are at a season-low.

**T**he boundaries of Washington State are superimposed over the lives and lands of twenty-nine recognized Native American tribes and nations: Chehalis, Colville, Cowlitz, Hoh, Jamestown S’Klallam, Kalispel, Lower Elwha Klallam, Lummi, Makah, Muckleshoot, Nisqually, Nooksack, Port Gamble S’Klallam, Puyallup, Quileute, Quinault, Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, Shoalwater Bay, Skokomish, Snoqualmie, Spokane, Squaxin Island, Stillaguamish, Suquamish, Swinomish, Tulalip, Upper Skagit, and Yakama as well as the Duwamish, Wanapum, and Chinook and significant off-reserve Indian populations in Seattle and other cities.







MY MOM,  
SISTERS, AUNTIES  
& GRANDMAS  
ARE  
SACRED





# We Survive without Justice:

## Sexual Assault Response and Indigenous Women

By Mother Nation

**T**he 1956 Indian Relocation Act sought to eliminate reservations, remove Native people from tribal lands and force assimilation into urban areas. Tribal citizens were relocated to cities, severing Native people from the political protections, teachings and practices, family and social relationships and all the power and possibility of living in Indigenous

communities. In cities like Seattle, Cleveland, Chicago and Denver, where relocation offices were established, escalating rates of sexual violence, murdered and missing Indigenous women, trafficking, homelessness and addiction among Native people can be traced back to the removal and relocation practices of this Act.



**98% of Native American domestic violence (DV) survivors and 97% of Native American women managing chemical dependency traced their history of personal violence back to childhood sexual assault.**

In Washington State, rates of life-course violence against Indigenous people are staggering. Arlene Red-Elk, Jamestown S’Klallam Elder and long-time anti-violence advocate, found in her programs that 98% of Native American domestic violence (DV) survivors and 97% of Native American women managing chemical dependency traced their history of personal violence back to childhood sexual assault. Arlene’s findings are echoed by the 2018 Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) initial report made in collaboration with the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from a 2010 comprehensive sexual violence survey of off-reserve Native American women in Seattle and King County. In the report, a staggering 94% of survey participants had been raped or sexually coerced at some point in their lives.’

Mother Nation was founded 9 years ago by Norine Hill, Oneida and Indigenous survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, addiction and poverty as the volunteer aid group, Native Women In Need. A tiny group with a huge reach, NWIN was an excellent steward of its small resources and soon began increasing services and supports. Since that time, we have grown into Mother Nation, a comprehensive non-profit grassroots Indigenous organization which offers cultural healing services, SA/DV advocacy, mentorship and homeless prevention in Washington. Mother Nation celebrates and inspires the success of Native families to honor the beauty and strength of Native culture, spirituality and values built on the ancestral strength of each participant.

Despite the internal strength of Indigenous people, the violation of sexual assault results in a complicated web of harm in the lives of individuals and peoples targeted by this violence. Physical, economic, emotional, psychological, spiritual: the web of harms spools out across years, across generations. We survive without meaningful support from service systems. We survive without justice.

**Cultural practices—the original instructions of our people and the technologies and practices we have developed over millennia—go hand in hand with recovery and healing.**

In the mainstream sexual assault response, harms to spirit are often seen only as a metaphor for emotional impacts or trauma. Among Indigenous peoples, spiritual harm is not a metaphor but an actual, life-threatening wound that must be attended to before any meaningful wellbeing—in the physical or spiritual realm—can be restored. Cultural practices—the original instructions of our people and the technologies and practices we have developed over millennia—go hand in hand with recovery and healing.

Indigenous people need access to our culture to heal, but non-Indigenous advocates & agencies do not have an education or understanding about our original instructions, teachings and medicines. They don’t know what our medicines do or what they represent. And for those advocates who do recognize the importance of cultural practices, they do not have the authority to replicate and offer Native American teachings outside of their Indigenous cultural context. One solution is straightforward: Mainstream advocates must refer survivors to *by and for* Native American cultural services in order for Indigenous survivors to access the supports they need.

**Mainstream advocates must refer survivors to by and for Native American cultural services in order for Indigenous survivors to access the supports they need.**

Yeha:wi Cultural Services is the program at the heart of Mother Nation's work and attends to the spiritual restoration that is a foundation for lasting safety, stability, community connectedness, efficacy and meaningful access to resources, to wellbeing.

Most advocates across Washington State, including those working in mainstream agencies, have the information that rates of sexual assault against Indigenous women are alarming. Many advocates have encountered the wisdom and power of Mother Nation's teachings at conferences or events.

But even though advocates recognize that the rates of sexual assault against our communities are extreme and even though advocates are aware of Mother Nation's services, mainstream agencies do not make referrals to Mother Nation. Native people constantly fall out of the consciousness of the mainstream antiviolence system. The emotional and spiritual healing mainstream advocates experience in our conference workshops and trainings do not translate into better services or better referrals for Indigenous women. The instant Mother Nation/Indigenous women are not standing right in front of you, the awareness that we even exist slips away.

We need our allies to know that this is not by accident. It is by design. This habit has been programmed into mainstream systems and ways of thinking since before first contact.

In 1452, the first Papal bull "Document of Discovery" was issued by the Vatican. This and subsequent documents established the 'right' for Christian explorers to claim lands in the name of their Christian monarchs. Explorers were empowered to 'discover', claim and exploit the resources of any land not already claimed by Christendom. They were exhorted to attempt to convert the humans they encountered and they were allowed to kill or enslave anyone who would not comply. All the technologies, knowledge and practices of the people these explorers encountered were pre-judged as savagery by the Documents of Discovery. Even when our technologies and philosophies and agricultural practices were taken back to Christendom with our gold and our children, their origin in Indigenous knowledge was completely erased. Everything was treated as an exploitable resource. Should these explorers save even one soul, the bloodshed and destruction would be seen as worth it, and if Christendom's coffers grew fat in the process, it simply was proof that the Christian God approved.

These documents are the foundation for international law and have been used throughout U.S. history to explain and justify colonization and genocide. Even in this century, the documents of discovery are cited in US Indian case law. Everything found in the natural and social world is there for the taking, Indigenous technologies, knowledge and practice are deemed inferior and 'civilizing' Indigenous people by forcing settler practices to replace Indigenous culture and teaching is seen as a generous moral good.





**The mainstream antiviolence movement comes to our communities like explorers, discovering new places and people who “need your help.”**

And so, by design, this dynamic rules the relationships between mainstream advocates and Indigenous programs to this very day. The mainstream antiviolence movement comes to our communities like explorers, discovering new places and people who “need your help”. Our technologies, original instructions and medicines, if they are noticed at all, are dismissed as naïve and primitive at best, savage at worst.

**If mainstream sexual assault agencies mean to support Indigenous survivors of rape, sexual assault, incest and trafficking, they must quit claim to the *rights of discovery*.**

Anything deemed to hold value is seen as ‘natural’, not cultural, and the mainstream feels entitled, even obligated, to strip it from its context and plunk it down anywhere it wants, without protocol or guidance or teaching. Meanwhile, mainstream “settler” practices overrun our communities like English Ivy, choking everything that grew before, and our energies are spent trying to rip out these invasive practices before we can even tend to our own.

When mainstream agencies do see Native survivors, it is often within the grasp of some settler system—in court being ordered into treatment, in the hospital enduring invasive exams, in administrative hearings begging to keep our children. We are stripped and emptied and you are waiting to fill us up with information and treatments that are non-Native.

If mainstream sexual assault agencies mean to support Indigenous survivors of rape, sexual assault, incest and trafficking, they must quit claim to the *rights of discovery*. People who would be allies must stop the habit of dismissing our approaches to justice and healing as primitive or metaphorical. You must not strip the culture from our teachings and cultural practices to appropriate in your own work as vague notions of wellbeing or spiritual entertainment.



**“By acknowledging the past and re-learning who we are as a Native people, Indigenous Sisters who participate in our programs transform their path to a journey of natural leadership and wisdom built on their ancestral strength gifted to them by Creator.”**

**Mother Nation**



## Open Your Eyes and Look Again

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To support Indigenous survivors, you must open your eyes and look again—at your own services and agencies, and at Native survivors and Indigenous cultural healing—in a good way. Here is what you could see.

- Settler solutions to rape and abuse ignore that Native women will never be safe while genocidal projects to eliminate Native peoples persist. It is clear that Native women are being targeted as part of the genocide that has been against our peoples since first contact.
- The sexual assault response system that is currently in place does not work for Indigenous women. Period. The system was designed to break up our nations and destroy our families. System Thinking Agencies—agencies where the limitations and needs of service, legal, child protection or other systems take priority over the needs of Indigenous people and families—make surviving harder.
- Indigenous people have a powerful way of changing our own lives and our women and families should be able to have access to it if they want to.
- Indigenous advocates serving indigenous people is best practice. Any Indigenous woman who approaches a WCSAP member agency should receive a warm referral to a *by and for* Indigenous organization, such as Mother Nation.
- Mainstream programs cannot meet all the needs. None of us can. Offer everything you can. But we need you to understand that Native communities have resources and knowledge that you do not know and do not have and cannot provide. Amplify the healing you have already invested in this survivor with a warm referral to additional supports.
- We are here. Indigenous survivors are here and Mother Nation is here. Some agencies will say, “Native women don’t come to our program.” It is not likely to be true, but if it is, you have to do some soul searching about why.
- Some agencies say, “We treat every survivor the same.” You collect demographics that satisfy your funders that you intake Native survivors, but you don’t connect those survivors to the teachings and traditions that they need to heal. So, more soul searching.
- We need more Indigenous advocates who can carry these teachings and work with Native survivors. Support a statewide tribal symposium to train more Indigenous advocates to serve Indigenous survivors.
- Native women telling their story over and over again in an attempt to find meaningful services is retraumatizing. Streamline basic intake information so that women don’t have to tell their story over and over and be retraumatized as they search for services and support.



It is difficult to sit among people who continue to ignore Native survivors and Native advocates. Native organizations and community agencies are frankly growing weary of it. But this dynamic is not inevitable. It is not natural. It is the direct result of generations of policy and practice. But the mainstream sexual assault field has all the tools and information it needs to shift the schism between the field and Indigenous cultural services. The mainstream sexual assault field in Washington State could make the commitment to ensure that every Indigenous survivor it encounters is connected to meaningful supports.



If you want to support Mother Nation's cultural services, you can make a contribution at [MotherNation.org/donate](https://MotherNation.org/donate)

## About the Author

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On Indigenous People's Day 2020, Mother Nation Elders, Leadership and advocates including Executive Director/Founder, Norine Hill, Oneida Nation of the Thames; Elder Rose Linda Looking, Assiniboine-Sioux; MartiRai Ramsey, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; and Elder Arlene Red Elk, Jamestown S'Klallam met to answer the question, "What do WCSAP programs need to know to support Native survivors?" This article, written by Connie Burk, derives from that discussion.





# Native Indigenous Framework for Healing from Sexual Assault in 2021

By Theda New Breast, MPH (Makoyohsokoyi-Milky Way)

**N**ative Indigenous knowledge during responsive cultural practices using Ancestral values show promise in preventing sexual assault and restoring families and communities to balance with solid mental health. Rolling out of a COVID-19 pandemic, experiencing increasing violence in 2020 for on and off Reservation families, and grasping the healing efforts of the “Me Too” Campaign with “No More Stolen Sisters” with Intervention of Native Men who immolate “Native Weinstein’s” -- all call for Native Indigenous Practices.

These practices bring ultimate health, healing, wellness and growth from historical trauma past and present. Native Indigenous Knowledge is experiential and often called a pathway or journey to self-actualization; many traditional knowledge keepers are heard to say, “The longest journey is from your head to your heart.”

“The longest journey is from your head to your heart.”



The incidence of missing murdered Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit (MMIWG2S) continues to reflect the reality of their vulnerability and a Public Health Crisis. Reclaiming rite of passages, from birth to grave, bring continued healing to Intergenerational trauma. Restoring beliefs that Women are Life givers, Women are respected, and Women are sacred by conducting ceremonies during birthing, naming ceremonies, placenta ceremonies, umbilical cord ceremonies, first laugh ceremonies, first word ceremonies, first step ceremonies, transition from girl to womanhood ceremonies, boy to manhood ceremonies, first successful hunting, gathering, or first job ceremonies, non-alcohol weddings, fatherhood / motherhood ceremonies, first grandchild ceremonies, first gray hair ceremonies, losing a parent ceremonies, and other rite-of-passages are benchmarks that indicate transferring into a solid Cultural identity that brings joy and contentment.

### **Native Indigenous knowledge is proactive.**

**Native Indigenous knowledge is proactive, and fortifies Cultural Identity** of all ages becoming a protective factor, beginning with Language restoration: immersion schools taught with only the language heard while still in diapers, media in the language with English subtitles, sign language, skits in the language, creation stories acted out in the language, zoom meetings in the language, college taught with bilingual instruction, and acting and drama schools producing historical truths with plays in the language, zoom talking circles in the language.

**Native Indigenous knowledge brings the teachings of the four seasons,** equinox solstice ceremonies, songs to sun and moon rotation, planting ceremonies, medicinal plant use to treat and prevent illness ceremonies, water

ceremonies, cleansing ceremonies, return from war and/or combat ceremonies, forgiveness ceremonies, grief /loss ceremonies, gratitude and honoring ceremonies, traditional and sustainability food ceremonies.

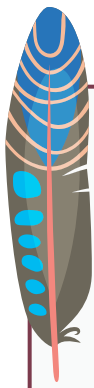
**Native Indigenous knowledge helps clarify and map out Cultural Identity** with community roles, gender roles, healthy sexuality roles, sisterhood roles, brotherhood roles, auntie roles, uncle roles, grandfather roles, grandmother roles, cousin roles, and other kinship roles that unify the extended family.



Native Wellness Institute's (NWI) mission is to keep the teachings of our ancestors alive. During the past three decades, our involvement in healing from residential school survival in Canada, and healing from Boarding school survival in the United States has led to the discovery that Sexual Assault is a root cause to many disparities of lower life expectancies, drug and alcohol epidemics (Opioids, fentanyl, methamphetamine), poverty, obesity, diabetes, suicides, homicides, and many mental health disorders.

We have taken what we learned to develop a "Best Practices" Administration of Native Americans (ANA) Healthy Relationship Training curriculum that occurs over 3-4 days with follow up sessions. The development of the healing curriculum began in 2005 and is ongoing with updates, amendments, new resources, new handouts, virtual adaptations, and a Training of Facilitators (TOF) format. Chapter 7 of the 8 chapters is called "Healthy Sexuality". During the 2020 Pandemic, we created a one-page handout framing the Intervention and Prevention of Sexual Assault based on successful healing efforts on First Nation Reserves in Canada, Reservations in the U.S., and Urban Health organizations serving Native Indigenous Families. The framework follows / adjacent change based on where it is located.





# Intervene and Prevent Sexual Assault Framework

Framework to Intervene and Prevent Sexual Abuse, in order to become healthier Native Communities.

- Create a Safe Place to learn and practice how to apologize to Self, and others.
- Embrace Values and beliefs that we are all capable of love, forgiveness, nurturing and understanding. This is what is necessary to maintain balance for an individual, family, and community.
- Believe that there is a Cycle of Sexual Abuse.
- Belief that in order to break the cycle and begin healing, the victimizer must be addressed with as little compromising of the victim as possible.
- Value and believe that the source of healing is first within oneself, one's family, and then one's community.
- That healing will happen holistically (physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually).
- An understanding that sexual abuse is one of the main contributing factors to alcohol, Opioids, methamphetamine addiction, and family violence.
- The belief that the individual, family, and community will only heal upon taking responsibility for their own healing process.
- Value and believe healing will only happen in an environment that is safe, open, and non-judgmental.
- Value and believe that healing Sexual Abuse is to include the victim, victimizer, and families.
- Value and believe that the safety and wellbeing of the victim is the first priority.
- Value and believe that in Sexual Abuse the victim is innocent of any wrongdoing.
- Value and believe that a victim needs to forgive the victimizer (when they are able). If they don't the victim will become prisoner of their own hate.
- Value and believe the victimizer was not born but made (a Colonizing trait).
- This person needs to get back in balance (forgiveness of self, others, systems).
- Value and believe the Victimizer needs to be accountable for his or her actions.





Our NWI team believes that storytelling is medicine to heal with.

## Story One

When our team first started Cultural exchanges with Australian Aboriginals in 2013 and toured with healing gatherings, we went to several different Aboriginal communities, treatment programs, health programs, etc. They referred to these programs as “Harmony Houses”, they were never called “Domestic Violence Programs”, or “Sexual Assault Programs”, they kept taking us to “Harmony Houses” and telling us that their people had fell out of harmony, and their jobs were to bring them back into harmony.

## Story Two

An Elder named Teresa Tendoy from the Rocky Boy Reservation told us that Sexual matters were never “Shameful”; she remembered growing up as a little girl, and they would have “Girl and Women’s teachings Circles in a large tipi with food and smudge”. She said they talked about everything that would help women, like they were describing how to please you husband without penetration, because of having your children a minimum of two years apart, they prevented pregnancy during that time. It also allowed breastfeeding to learn self-regulation. She said it wasn’t until “outsiders” came, boarding schools, they brought shame to sexual health, and they brought shame to a beautiful part of life. She said this in a Gathering of Native Americans (GONA) in the 90’s.



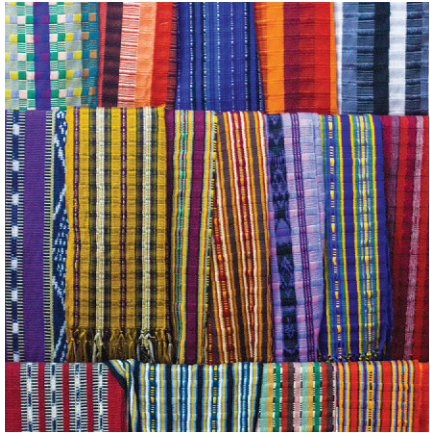
From more information visit:  
[NativeWellness.com](http://NativeWellness.com)



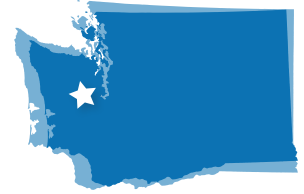
## About Bio

Theda New Breast, M.P.H. (Makoyohsokoyi-Blackfoot name): Born and raised on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, with a Relocation experience in the SF Bay area during the Civil rights Movement, entering UC Berkeley at 17 years old and receiving her B.S.W & M.P.H. in Health Promotion and Prevention. Theda is a founding board member and master trainer/facilitator for the Native Wellness Institute (NWI) 1988-present. She is also a board member of the Sovereign Bodies Institute (SBI), launched in 2019, builds on Indigenous traditions of data gathering and knowledge transfer to create, disseminate, and put into healing on gender, sexual violence against Indigenous people and MMIWG (Missing Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls). Theda has been a leading authority on Indigenous Cultural Resilience Internationally in Canada, Lower 48, Alaska, Australia, and New Zealand on Proactive healing from Historical Trauma, Post Traumatic Growth, Mental Health Healing and Sobriety/Recovery/Adult Children of Alcoholic (ACOA). She is co-founder and Co-writer of the GONA (Gathering of Native Americans) curriculum, one of the Ten Effective Practices and Models in Communities of Color. Theda is a Khan-nat-tso-miitah (Crazy Dog) Society member and Kaamipoisaamiiksi (owner of a Standup Headdress) Blackfoot Women’s Society. She Sundanced with the late Buster Yellow Kidney’s bundle for 10 years. In 2013, The Red Nations Film Festival Honored Theda with a Humanitarian Award for her lifetime of healing work with Tribes and with a Red Nations statuette for her documentary short called, “Why The Women in My Family Don’t Drink Whiskey” (Free on YouTube). The Blackfeet Tribal Council has recognized her Leadership skills and appointed her unanimously to The Board of Trustees for the Blackfeet Community College for years 2014-2017. She is currently certifying Healthy Relationship Trainers for NWI, which is a curriculum identified as “Best Practice” from ANA (Administration for Native Americans).

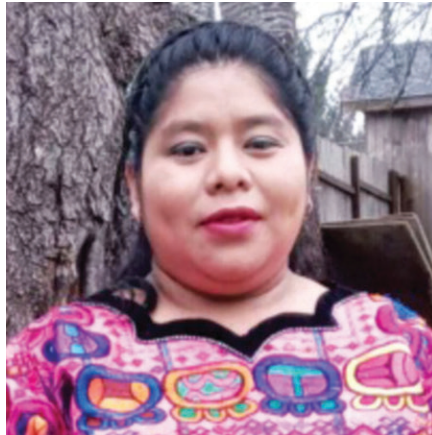








Lucia Esteban



Carmen Pablo Ahilon

# CIELO's Indigenous Advocates

Interview with Lucia Esteban and Carmen Pablo Ahilon  
Interviewed by Carolina Gutierrez  
Translated by Claudia A'Zar

*Carolina: Would you please introduce yourself?*



**Lucia:** My name is Lucia Esteban. I was born in the United States and grew up in Guatemala. My parents are from San Pedro Soloma, in the department of Huehuetenango, Guatemala. When I was three years old, my parents decided to return to San Pedro Soloma so that my siblings and I could grow up there. I am so grateful because I learned the Kanjobal language, the culture, and the traditions of my country. I moved back to the United States six years ago and I started studying English. I work for CIELO, a Latino organization based in Olympia and I work as a domestic violence and sexual abuse advocate in the community of Shelton.



**Carmen:** Hi, my name is Carmen Pablo Ahilon and I am a member of the Mam-speaking community of Guatemala. I work at CIELO, a Latino organization, we have an office in Olympia but we also serve the Shelton community. I work with victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

*Please tell us about your community.*



**Lucia:** Shelton, WA has a large community from San Pedro Soloma. The primary language of the people of the community is Kanjobal. Although most speak Spanish, there are a few people who only speak Kanjobal. In my work as an advocate, I have witnessed the suffering of

my community, many families who have come to this country do not have a home in Guatemala or have fled for safety reasons. They come here looking for a chance for a better future. This is one of the reasons why I work with the community, to help them by providing them with resources and support.



**Carmen:** In Shelton there is a very large Mam-speaking community and most people only speak Mam, they don't speak Spanish and much less English. If their children were born here in the US or came here when they were very young and went to school, they learned to speak Spanish and also English; however, their parents did not because in Guatemala we only spoke Mam at home, we never spoke Spanish because we never learned it.

Mam is a spoken language, not written one. The written language was lost many years ago because it was not taught, so now it is only spoken, not written. My community does not read or write

### *How are indigenous communities treated in Guatemala and here in the US?*



**Carmen:** In Guatemala, we, indigenous people are very mistreated because of the language. They tell us that we don't know how to speak and that we get tongue-tied; and yes, they make fun of us. They also make fun of the way we dress, in our traditional dress. Here, we also experience a lot of discrimination at work. Sometimes people make fun because we don't understand what they're saying and they laugh and say "Oh, those natives don't understand" and they always look at us weird because of our traditional dress.

### *Did you ever think that you would work as an advocate in your community?*

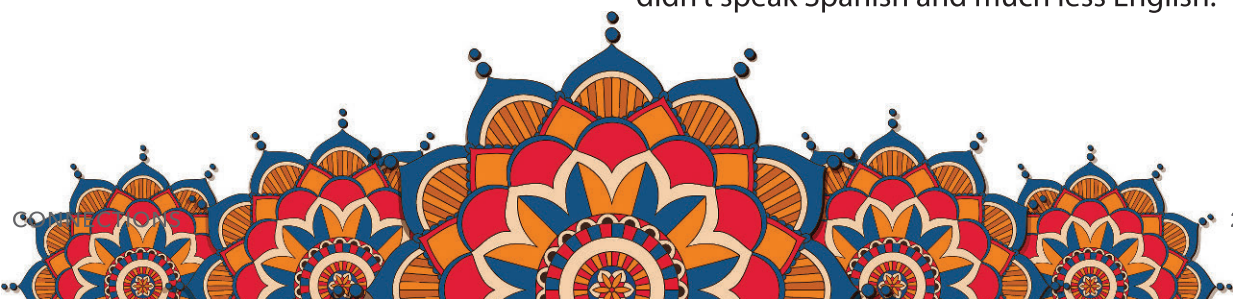


**Lucia:** No, after arriving from Guatemala I started working at a brush-packing company. I would go to work after school in the afternoons. I worked there for two years. This was until Ricardo del Bosque, a leader in the Shelton community, talked to me about CIELO. He said that they were going to open an office in Shelton. At the time, I didn't know anything about CIELO, just that they taught English classes. So I looked for information and applied. When I started working, I thought that the job was just to provide information but later I discovered the real intensity of the work so I attended trainings and gradually I started learning. It has helped me immensely, even at a personal level, because it really is not easy to work with victims of sexual abuse or domestic violence. However, when I work with people, I feel good because I am able to help with resources, I can let them know that they have options and that they can have a better future. This gives me even more encouragement and I enjoy the work even when people are not from Guatemala.

### *What led you to this work as an advocate?*



**Carmen:** What led me to this work as an advocate was the desire to help my community. Before working for CIELO, I used to help my family and people who knew me as an interpreter because for them it was very difficult to go to the doctor, look for resources, or go to the clinic because they could not communicate in Spanish or English. They would always look for me to help them; that is how I came to do this work, through the desire to help. I worked at the school as an interpreter helping families that didn't speak Spanish and much less English.





*Have people in your community asked you how they can have a job like yours?*



**Lucia:** Yes, people my age have asked me “how did you get that job?” and I encourage them to keep acquiring the necessary training. I also tell them the story of how I was given this work opportunity. They interviewed me and they told me that they would let me know. I was incredibly nervous and did not know if I would get the job and I remember that I was working at the company, packing brush, when I received the phone call. They were offering me the job. I felt so happy. I felt so grateful for the opportunity that they were giving me. And what I tell people is to keep looking for opportunities because here we can make something of ourselves; we can work hard for what we want.

*Yes, Lucia, it is important for people to also be able to aspire to have a job just like yours and for them to be able to help their own community. What has been the hardest part of this job?*



**Lucia:** The language is a challenge but I would say the hardest part is to go to court with people. It is difficult for me to watch people recall those moments, what they have gone through, but I make myself look tough so that they can see that they are not alone and that we are there to support and help them. It was hard because I did not have experience but I have learned with time.



**Carmen:** The hardest part was that I used to think that I was only going to help my community but when I started to work with survivors it was very difficult, especially if the case involved children. This work in itself is very hard, traumatic even, and each case that we work on touches us; it is painful because we are human.

*What keeps you doing this job? What motivates you to continue working?*

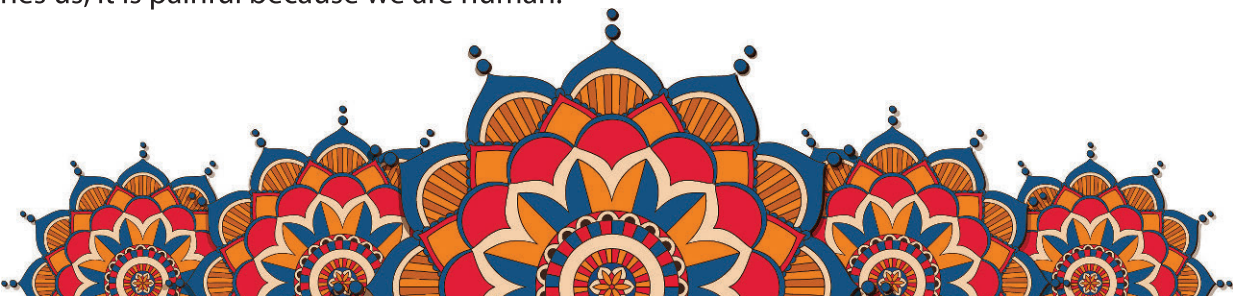
*“I thought that all I knew how to do was to work at companies packing brush or cleaning houses, but no, by God’s grace, I was able to get to where I am now.”*



**Lucia:** There’s a special person in my life and that is you, Carolina. From the very beginning when I started working, you motivated me so much because I didn’t know how to start. I didn’t have any experience and I thought that all I knew how to do was to work at companies packing brush or cleaning houses, but no, by God’s grace, I was able to get to where I am now and I have to thank you, Carolina, for the opportunity. And that is what keeps me strong so I can keep working, knowing that it is possible, especially when I love working with the community. And here I am, constantly learning.



**Carmen:** What motivates me is a desire to continue serving my community. Helping in order for victims to have the support they need and receive justice. Often, families don’t know about the availability of resources or they don’t know how to report what has happened to them, either out of fear of not being able to communicate in their language or not being able to clearly explain what has happened or because they don’t have someone that can help them.



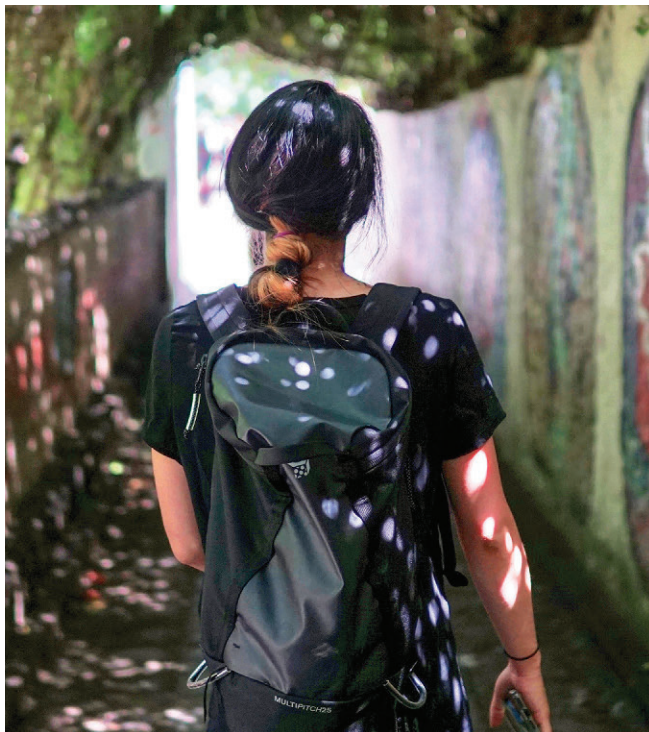
*Thank you, Lucia; I have learned a lot from you too and I am enormously proud of you. What have you heard your community say when they hear that there is someone from their country representing them?*



**Lucia:** People tell my dad “your daughter is working here helping the community” and my dad too will say to me, “I’m referring people to you who need help with information”. There are people who go “wow, you are working there, congratulations, keep working hard because you are indeed able to help the community.”

I have seen my work thrive because now I am known and I am trusted, an even though I may not speak their language, members of the Mam community also look for me and try to speak to me in Spanish even though they only speak it a little bit. I also try to help them but if I am not able to, I refer them to my coworker Carmen.

The community is grateful that we are able to help them and when they see that we are from Guatemala, they feel even more comfortable talking to us.



*“They are happy to know that I am there and they look for me when they need help because they know that I am going to take care of them and they know that I will support them.”*



**Carmen:** Well, I have been told “it’s good that you are working in that program; it is so great that you are able to speak all three languages because many of us would like to and want to help or work but we can’t because we haven’t had the chance to go to school. Now, since you are able, go ahead and work as hard as you can.” They are happy to know that I am there and they look for me when they need help because they know that I am going to take care of them and they know that I will support them. They know where to go to find resources and where they can go and express themselves in their own language.

*In order to know and serve the Kanjobal-speaking and Mam-Speaking communities better, what programs do you think that are missing?*

*“We are in need of staff that share their culture. That would help people to feel more comfortable and well represented.”*



**Lucia:** I would say that maybe they need people like us, who also speak the language, whether it is Kanjobal or another language. Having that would allow them to attend programs and receive services and have the opportunity to speak their own language. There are also people who can’t read or write and they are even more timid. So, I think that we are in need of staff that share their culture. That would help people to feel more comfortable and well represented.





**Carmen:** I believe they are missing staff that can speak those indigenous languages, not only Mam but other languages too.

People look for services and expect to receive help in their own language. I also hear about how hard it is for many programs to find an interpreter.

*Carmen, what would you like people to know about your community?*



**Carmen:** I would like them to know that we are very responsible people; we are hard workers; we work hard for our families and we are also

humble people and very shy too when it comes to speaking Spanish, even more so when it comes to English but that when we start feeling comfortable we don't stop talking, although we are always very shy, responsible and respectful.

*Lucia, what would you like other advocates to know if they have clients who speak Kanjobal, or if they work in indigenous communities?*



**Lucia:** In Guatemala, there is discrimination and abuse, there is no protection for women and children when something happens. I recently

heard that there is a little bit of help available in my hometown, but it all depends on whether people report it. For example, if someone has been the victim of sexual abuse by a family member or someone else, they very much fear reporting it because there is a danger that someone in their family might be killed or kidnapped.

But once one comes here to the United States everything changes; we see that there is a lot more support for women here. People who have suffered violence in my community have told me, "we feel more protected here; we have seen that we receive help and if something were to happen we can come here to see you; we have seen how you work and how you help people

and we are grateful to this country for that opportunity; it is true that we are here without papers but we are here working hard to provide a better life and a better future for our children."

**"I am willing to help other advocates; I don't know everything but working together we may be able to find solutions."**

And lastly, I would like to tell other advocates to be patient when they work with someone who doesn't speak English or Spanish. And if at all possible, to hire staff that also speak other indigenous languages like we do. I am willing to help other advocates; I don't know everything but working together we may be able to find solutions. We can have meetings and then we would be able to support each other and better serve the community.



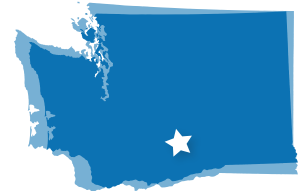








## ADVOCATE SPOTLIGHT



# Yakama Nation Behavioral Health Victim Resource Program

Interview with Crystal Esquivel and Rubén Calvario  
Interviewed by Patricia Flores

*Patricia: Who are you, what is your role and how long have you been with YN VRP?*



**Crystal:** Crystal Esquivel and I'm the Program specialist for the VAWA grant. I have been with the Yakama Nation Behavioral Health Victim Resource Program for about 4 years.



**Rubén:** My name is Rubén Calvario, and I've been employed with the Confederated Tribes And Bands of the Yakama Nation for the past 4 years. In addition I've resided within the boundaries of the Yakama Nation all my life and have attended the public school and graduated from Heritage University with a Bachelors in Social Work and a minor in criminal justice.

**“AND THE DAY CAME WHEN THE RISK TO REMAIN TIGHT IN A BUD WAS MORE PAINFUL THAN THE RISK IT TOOK TO BLOSSOM.”**

Anais Nin

*What brought you to this work?*



**Crystal:** I have always known I had a passion for helping others, however, wasn't quite sure in what capacity. I believe faith brought me to this work as I did not see myself working in this career field. I enjoy what I do in providing resources to our community as well as, being able to help make a difference in someone's life.



**Rubén:** I've had a passion in ensuring to utilize my skills and knowledge to educate and build professional relationships with providers and community members. It's important to me that many folks are aware of the resources and or services available to them. Being able to utilize what I've learned to understand and strive to improve the lives of people in society is an important reason for me to continue to do the work I do.

*When did YN VRP start?*



**Rubén:** The Victim Resource Program started in January 2016 with the vision of being able to provide services and assistance to individuals who been impacted by their immediate mental health and safety.

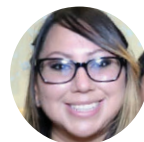
*Please tell us about the community YN VRP works with.*



**Rubén:** We work and welcome all Native American members who are enrolled members, descendants, and non-enrolled members affiliated through marriage.

*Who is on your team and what do they do?*

**Our cultural specialist focuses on integrating traditional practices and healing to our survivors.**



**Crystal:** Our Program has five Program Coordinators, six advocates and a cultural specialist who each focuses on different areas of victims of crime such as, sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, sex trafficking, dating violence, elder abuse, Missing and Murdered Indigenous women/people, and general crime. Our cultural specialist focuses on integrating traditional practices and healing to our survivors.

*What do you want the readers to know about sexual assault advocacy on the Yakama Reservation and the work VRP does?*



**Rubén:** We have trained advocates available to be there for those in need of our services. Sexual Assault is overlooked for Native Americans. Native Americans are seen as exotic and are at higher risk of being sexually assaulted. Our advocates are available to provide moral support for screenings, forensic interviews, court hearings, transportation and other resources needed. Our program focuses on a comprehensive and trauma informed care approach to provide quality services.





### What is difficult about doing this work?

Advocates are trained to be the strength of the survivor and one must maintain composure in hard cases for the well-being of the client.

**“WHAT YOU DO MAKES A DIFFERENCE. AND YOU HAVE TO DECIDE WHAT KIND OF DIFFERENCE YOU WANT TO MAKE.”**

Jane Goodall



**Crystal:** In caring for your mental health and creating boundaries as it is a high emotional stressed environment. Advocates are trained to be the strength of the survivor and one must maintain composure in hard cases for the well-being of the client. It is important for advocates to practice self-care to prevent vicarious trauma and secondary trauma. Moreover, it not only affects the victim but the community as well.



**Rubén:** Being able to practice self-care can be a challenge with the work that we do involving advocacy and ensuring safety is a top priority at all times. However, Victim Advocates are trained and given opportunities to navigate stressful situations and also offer Employee Assistance Program where they can seek mental health services.

*What do you think are the most important issues facing Native survivors?*

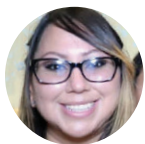


**Crystal:** There are many factors Native American survivors face is they are an underserved population. In small communities it becomes difficult for survivors to speak up due to traditions and fear of retaliation. We need better resources for our Indian Health Clinic and Justice System to better serve our survivors.



**Rubén:** I believe there is many factors that are important issues to keep in the forefront when working with Native American survivors. To start off being able to keep a lot of the direct service practices within the reservation is important to many due to being able to have a set up to commute with a transit bus system. Native survivors are a vulnerable population and have reported to experience violence at some point in their lives. Communication and trust is an important factor to keep in mind especially because there are some folks who may have a hard time in speaking up to seek assistance for their safety or well-being due to fear of retaliation.

*What motivates you to continue the work?*

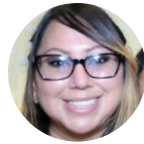


**Crystal:** There is still much to be done. We are just at the tip of the iceberg and need to continue to grow in working with the Justice System to help our survivors with moral support. Moreover, focusing on the Mental Health of the survivors to build a safe space for survivors to feel comfort and empowered.



**Rubén:** What motivates me to continue to be here today is the tremendous amount of work that has been done to pave the way for others to participate and obtain services from our program.

*What do you think is missing in Sexual Assault Advocacy work that would better serve Native survivors?*



**Crystal:** Shelter. There is a lack of resources for sexual assault survivors to receive assistance with shelter. Also, having a trauma Informed care approach of helping survivors.



**Rubén:** The most important thing missing is a shelter location where these individuals may receive assistance to get the services, they need of a trained sexual assault Advocate who can ensure to provide support and start the groundwork that is needed to heal.

*What would you like others to know about Indigenous healing?*



**Crystal and Rubén:**

We all have different beliefs and for advocates to learn the

beliefs is important as it helps gain a better understanding of how some survivors heal. There are many forms of healing such as praying, ceremonial practices, using tobacco and/ or sage to clear and keep the negative energy away and uplifting one's spirits.

*Is there anything else you wish to share with the readers?*



**Crystal and Rubén:**

We have a REDgalia Campaign that focuses on Missing and

Murdered Indigenous Women and Missing and Murder Indigenous People. We wear red on Thursdays to shed light and honor our MMIW and MMIP as they are never forgotten.



# Question Oppression

Exploring the Connections Between Sexual Violence & Oppression

Use these questions to explore the connections between sexual violence and oppression with staff, volunteers, or board members.

Try discussing one or more at a staff meeting, in-service, volunteer training, or board retreat.

## Proactive Indigenous Knowledge

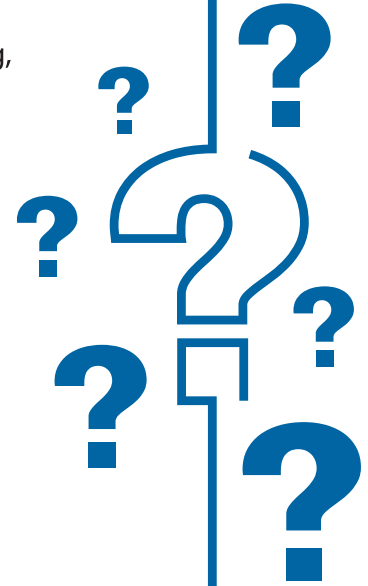
Reflect on the protective factors (ceremony) as described by Theda New Breast as “proactive” Indigenous Knowledge. How does this align with primary prevention and norms change work you might be doing in your community?

## Honor and Implement Wisdom

What did you learn? How can you honor and implement the wisdom shared from these articles?

## Invisibilizing Native Communities

Mother Nation discusses mainstream programs of invisibilizing Native communities. How can you practice acknowledgment, presence, and contribution of First Peoples in your role?





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