



Reclaiming Futures initiative from a Sicangu Lakota tribal perspective: Lessons shared

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ABSTRACT

This paper tells a story about one of the initiatives sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation known as Oyate Teca Owicakiya (Helping Young People). Oyate Teca Owicakiya was located on the Rosebud reservation, an extremely rural area in South Dakota. This was the only indigenous-based initiative funded by the Foundation. The initiative was undertaken by the Sinte Gleska University to provide services to reclaim youth from the justice system. This collaborative built on existing structures and community networks to strengthen and coordinate services for youth. The Reclaiming Futures model was adapted to the local setting by utilizing tribal resources. The background of the setting, its unique tribal governmental structure, demographics, and socioeconomic indicators are presented, and finally, eleven lessons are discussed. The success of the initiative was the strength and resiliency of the community itself, its members, and the network of individuals and organizations who came together for troubled tribal youth and their families.

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1. Introduction

The Reclaiming Futures initiative was developed in partnership with the Sicangu Lakota Nation or the Rosebud Sioux Tribe in 2002 for 5 years, and a two-year renewal period was granted for a total of 7 years. The major purpose was to improve the lives of tribal youth who had substance abuse problems and were involved with the juvenile justice system. To understand this partnership, it is vital to share with readers the unique setting of this Reclaiming Futures site; therefore, the next section will describe these special realities. This discussion is exploratory in nature and descriptive in its overview.

1.1. Introduction to the setting

The importance of understanding the setting is based on standpoint theory, which describes “truths or knowledge created through awareness of reality gleaned from particular social locations” (Swigonski, 1994). The Sicangu Lakota, or Rosebud Sioux, a tribal² group of the western Teton Dakota, live on the Rosebud Sioux reservation, the sixth largest land-based reservation in the country. The Rosebud Sioux reservation consists of 5000 square miles in south central South Dakota and borders the Pine Ridge reservation on its

northwest corner and the state of Nebraska to the south. Knowing who you are and where you come from, including knowing your tribal identity, creates a crucial foundation for all of us, particularly our youth, so recognizing the journey made by the ancestors of contemporary Rosebud Sioux Tribal members is of paramount importance.

2. Brief history of the Sicangu Lakota Rosebud people

The Sioux Tribes consist of the Seven Original Council Fires, one of which is known as the Lakota (Rosebud Sioux Tribe, 2010a). The Sicangu Oyate (Burnt Thigh People) are from that Council Fire. In the 1880s, the Tribes of the Great Sioux Nation signed treaties with the United States establishing tribal boundaries and recognizing their rights as a sovereign government. The U.S. Congress originally reduced the Rosebud Sioux tribal lands to a reservation in the Sioux Bill of 1899 (Sioux Bill, 1899), which identified all the Lakota/Dakota/Nakota reservations in what is known as the Great Sioux Settlement. The boundaries were further reduced by the previous Homestead Act of 1862. The Sicangu people were moved five times before the Rosebud agency was finally established by the federal government. The Sicangu Lakota have the status of a sovereign nation, which gives them the right to establish their own tribal government, including election of their own officials, regulation of their own territory, management of tribal affairs, and creation and enforcement of tribal laws, statutes, policies, and procedures codified in their Tribal Codes. The Rosebud Sioux tribe has a Tribal Court, including a Children's Court, for disposition of cases related to juveniles.

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² The term “tribal” will be used interchangeably with indigenous, American Indian, Native American, Native, and the tribe's own word for themselves, Sicangu Lakota.

The Rosebud Sioux tribal government operates under a constitution. Harold I. Ickes, then Secretary of the Interior of the United States, approved the constitution and the by-laws on December 20, 1935, the same year the Social Security Act of 1935 was signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The constitution is consistent with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (IRA) and was approved by the tribal membership and Tribal Council of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe.

The Tribe maintains jurisdiction within the boundaries of the reservation, including all rights-of-way, waterways, watercourses, and streams running through any part of the reservation and to such others lands as may be added to the reservation under the laws of the United States. The Tribal Council consists of a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Sergeant-at-Arms, and 20 Council members that are elected by the tribal members in staggered two-year terms. The Tribal Council meets each month in Rosebud. The Rosebud Tribe is a sovereign nation within the state of South Dakota and thus has a nation-to-nation relationship with the United States.

As stated on the tribal website, the overall goal of the Rosebud Sioux Nation is to “continue progress in the development of increased self-sufficiency. This includes developing human, natural and cultural resources to preserve traditions and educate Tribal members and non-members, and strengthen the economy on the reservation. The Nation wants to maintain its language and culture and, at the state time, develop new environmentally appropriate economic opportunities for our future generations” (Rosebud Sioux Tribe, 2010b).

3. Demographics

The total population in South Dakota is 812,383, and the American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) population living in the state of South Dakota constitutes 8.5% of the state's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The Rosebud Sioux Tribe's total American Indian population living on the Rosebud reservation varies by data source. In 2003, there were 24,426 enrolled tribal members, of which 20,762 tribal members were living on the Rosebud Sioux reservation. An estimated 3664 tribal members were living off the reservation at that time (Rosebud Sioux Tribe, 2010c).

In 2006, the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Enrollment Office reported a total enrolled population of 27,092 tribal members, with over 85% living on the reservation. By contrast, the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) reported a total population of 10,469, with 5836 or 55.7% who are 18 years and over and 4633 or 44.3% under the age of 18. The median age is 21.5 years. If 44.3% of the total population remains under the age of 18, using the current tribal enrollment number of those living on the reservation, then close to 10,200 tribal members are under the age of 18. The U.S. Census Bureau has a long history of undercounting individuals living in isolated and rural reservation settings (Sandfur, Rindfuss, & Cohen, 1996). It is projected that the population count is twice that of the official census count. These figures support the need for additional resources and service delivery for this disenfranchised population.

4. Socioeconomic and behavioral indicators

In many areas of social, behavioral, health, and economic determinants, the Rosebud tribal members are at or near the lowest of national, state, and federal well-being indicators. Willetto (2007) studied 10 well-being indicators and concluded that Native children and youth in South Dakota have “extremely worse well-being than their non-Native peers, sometimes with shockingly high percent differences” (p. 169). The litany of social, health, and economic problems is a reflection of the long history of colonialism and trauma from the injustices of structural racism, oppression, and social and economic disparities and the complex, turbulent, and often difficult relationships with federal and state entities over tribal and individual rights. Conflict over few resources and major differences in world

view, culture, and traditions have led to extreme inequality and discrimination, prejudice, and other forms of violence (Young, 2000).

Some of these indicators are described below. It is beyond the scope of this article to give more detail, but to show the scope of the problem is paramount and relevant.

Social. One of the primary social units on the reservation is the extended family. The Rosebud Nation consists of a population that is primarily young and growing; children are traditionally considered sacred. However, death by suicides is at an epidemic level. Between 2006 and 2008, there were 32 suicides; in addition, 193 people attempted suicide in 2006, and 51 people attempted suicide in the first 6 months of 2007 (Cuthand, 2009). As Tribal Councilman Robert Moore (2009) testified, “Over the past several years in the Rosebud Sioux Tribe alone, we have witnessed dozens of suicides and hundreds of documented suicide attempts. The situation became so bad that in 2007, our Tribal President declared a State of Emergency in order to draw attention and resources to the problem” (p. 6).

Behavioral. Research indicates in areas of high poverty, many youth suffer psychiatric disorders such as dual diagnoses, substance use and mental health issues, and abuse.

Health. Health conditions are very poor for tribal members, with extremely high rates of alcoholism, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes. The death rate from diabetes is five times the national rate. High death rates from cancer, car accidents, and cirrhosis and other liver disease are also reported by the Indian Health Service. The average life expectancy is 64.8 years, compared to 75.8 years for the general population. The total budget for Indian Health Services is exceedingly low considering the high need both on reservations and in urban areas.

High-risk sexual activity. There is an estimated 325 people living with HIV/AIDS in South Dakota, 71% male and 29% female. Native Americans are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS with a rate of 16%, compared to less than 1% of the general population.

Poverty. The poverty rate for Native Americans living on the Rosebud reservation and on trust land in other counties is 57%, compared to 39% for all American Indians on U.S. reservations, and 13% for the state of South Dakota generally. It is estimated that Todd County is the fifth poorest county in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Unemployment. The unemployment rate is 20.3% on the reservation, compared to the national average of 5.8% (Simply Hired, 2011) and 4.8% for South Dakota (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

Income. The average salary for jobs in Rosebud, South Dakota is \$20,537, and the median income of households in Rosebud was \$19,906 (Simply Hired, 2011). The average income in South Dakota overall is \$38,644 (USDA, 2010).

Housing. Considering the extremely high poverty rate, there is lack of adequate housing. The quality of housing is very poor to substandard in many cases, and many homes do not have basic services.

5. Sinte Gleska and Reclaiming Futures

It is a true testament to the resilience, self-sufficiency, and determination of the Sangu Lakota that they are providing for their youth and families despite conditions of structural racism, overt oppression, and social, economic, and health injustices and disparities. It is within this spirit of the next Seven Generations that the tribe through Sinte Gleska University decided to form a partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson's Reclaiming Futures (RF) Project to develop an innovative, comprehensive, and system-wide substance abuse reduction and juvenile justice reform model within their nation.

The Sinte Gleska University application was one of 280 other applications submitted to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) for funding in this national initiative. Among the 10

communities around the country that were awarded these original grants, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe was the only tribal site selected. In March 2002, Sinte Gleska University (SGU), was awarded a \$249,155 grant for 5 years (renewable annually) to improve substance abuse treatment and other services for young people in trouble with the law.

Sinte Gleska University, named after Chief Spotted Tail, who believed his people must be educated in both worlds to survive, was chartered by the Rosebud Sioux Tribe in 1971 as a tribal community college. In 1992, SGU was accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and achieved university status. The mission of Sinte Gleska University is to plan, design, implement, and assess post-secondary programs and other educational resources uniquely appropriate to the Lakota people to facilitate individual development and tribal autonomy. It was within this mission that SGU brought the appropriate partners together in a neutral setting to propose to undertake this work to reclaim youth and families from drugs, alcohol, and the justice system.

The concepts and practices of helping and healing are underscored with the deep appreciation and understanding of the traditional linguistics, values, traditions, life ways, and philosophy among the Lakota people and nation. These principles undergird the community, and individual actions, ideas, and practices were integrated in the RF initiative (Voss, Douville, Little Soldier, & White Hat, 1999).

Sinte Gleska University's project, called Oyate Teca Owicakiya (Helping Young People), proposed to serve about 75 young people and their families each year in the Rosebud Sioux Tribe's Children's Court beginning in 2003. This next section will tell the story about how the partnership came to be, but first it will be helpful to describe conditions on the Rosebud reservation before the RF partnership.

Just prior to the RF partnership, the court received training and funding to implement a drug court, the Youth Wellness Court (YWC), and was planning the construction of a juvenile detention center, the Wanbli Wiconi Tipi (WWT) Youth Wellness and Renewal Center. In 2000, the court reported that 539 youth (337 males and 202 females), ages 10 to 17 were processed through the court, most frequently on charges of underage consumption, disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, vandalism, aggravated assault, theft, and domestic abuse. Of these, 410 charges were alcohol related. Depending on the charge, juveniles were either released to parents, placed on probation, referred to the newly developed Youth Wellness Court, or detained in jail. Although the majority of the charges were alcohol related, youth were not screened or assessed in any way, nor referred for counseling, treatment, or other services until after their fifth offense. Over 50% of youth charged were 17 years old. The majority were at least two grade levels behind, if they were attending school at all, and many came from homes with substance abuse present. The YWC team consisted only of juvenile court personnel, and inpatient adolescent treatment was at least 200 miles away.

5.1. Forming the partnership

The first year of the Reclaiming Futures initiative was a planning year, with technical assistance provided by the RF National Program Office located at Portland State University, Graduate School of Social Work. The grant covered two activities: (1) developing a substance abuse reduction plan in conjunction with a community plan to reform juvenile justice systems within this tribal context; and (2) convening a national juvenile judges fellowship forum. The overall goal of the initiative was to improve treatment and social services for young offenders and their families, increase the capacity of local agencies and organizations, and develop an interagency management information system.

Coordination of the initiative was provided by the Sicangu Policy Institute of Sinte Gleska University. Marlies White Hat, a non-Indian married to a Rosebud tribal member, who has lived on the reservation for 40 years, was selected as the Project Director. A graduate of SGU,

she has worked for 25 years at the university on issues of substance abuse, health, wellness, women, violence, crime prevention, welfare reform, childcare, and economic development. Another person was the Honorable Judge Janel Y. Sully, an associate judge for Rosebud Sioux Tribal Court and an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. Prior to her 2003 bench appointment, she served as the court's chief prosecutor for 8 years. Judge Sully was instrumental in the creation of a youth wellness court, a youth diversion program, the Wanbli Wiconi Tipi Juvenile Detention Center, and a gang task force. She received awards from the Women in Law Association and the U.S. Attorney's Office for her work on behalf of the victims of crime. She was appointed as the Rosebud reservation's judicial fellow for the RF initiative.

Core partners recruited for this initiative included the following: Sinte Gleska University, Rosebud Sioux Tribe (RST) Children's Court, RST Alcohol Program, RST Piya Mani Otipi/Transitional Living Center, Rosebud Indian Health Service Behavioral Health, RST Law Enforcement, RST Wanbli Wiconi Tipi/Youth Wellness & Renewal Center (Detention), RST Tribal Education Department, Todd County School District, St. Francis Indian School, and Sicangu Child and Family Services.

The partnership soon expanded to include spiritual leaders, elders and community volunteers, Catholic Social Services, KINI Radio, *Todd County Tribune*, RST Community Health Representative Program, RST Employment and Training Program, RST Diabetes Program, White Buffalo Calf Women's Society, Native American Advocacy Program, Rosebud Educational Society, Oyate Networking Project, Boys and Girls Clubs of Rosebud, Sicangu Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, and Wiconi Wakan Health and Healing Center.

The implicit member of the initiative was the Rosebud reservation Community itself: they were the participants. Families of the youth to whom the services were directed were engaged in many ways to make this a success in this unique setting.

Getting the initiative off the ground took some time while many factors were addressed, including training staff and partners on new computers, assessment and treatment models, access to resources, historical mistrust of outside programs, lack of communication between existing entities who needed to work together to build a network for troubled youth and their families, and lack of some basic infrastructure, such as poor roads, long distances between few community resources, and little if any reliable or public transportation. Cross-cultural misunderstandings occurred in the manner of bridging the gap between two worlds: one world represents Western ways of knowing including different styles of leadership, group organizing, and reliance on a single expert, whereas the second world represents Indigenous ways of knowing including organizations and communities centered on tribal and collective leadership, and reliance on finding consensus and more nonhierarchical involvement of elders, youth, and spiritual leaders in every part of the decision making. The notion of time—decisions taking much longer, with many individuals involved in each step, and tribal and group needs paramount, with less focus on the individual needs—planning, and processing were different than in an urban community, where more resources and sophisticated technology are available. The Rosebud Tribe and People had the historical commitment and unique values to implement the project, and the RF National Program Office became more flexible to accommodate a different balance of time expectations.

6. The partnership on the Rosebud reservation

The initiative had three major goals: (1) adopt an assessment and treatment model; (2) develop a system-wide data management process to share data between relevant entities; and (3) work with the local tribal court in developing policies and procedures to ease the transition between the social and health providers in making services

more seamless and sustainable. These goals were directed at the community-wide level to provide more coordinated and integrated services for youth in the juvenile justice system with substance abuse problems.

The specific programs developed are listed below.

6.1. Program development for assessment and treatment

- Provides substance abuse assessment for teens and their parents at the front end of the system to determine appropriate treatment and counseling services, from prevention to treatment, family recovery, aftercare, and referrals based on need.
- Provides case management, quality assurance, and weekly case review by a core team of providers.
- Developed a 45-day, culturally relevant, evidence-based adolescent inpatient treatment program on Rosebud. Recently completed construction and will soon open a 120-day Meth Treatment Unit adjacent to the RST Alcohol Treatment Program.
- Provides equine therapy within the treatment programs to heal and reconnect youth and families with the Horse Nation.

6.2. Pro-social opportunities

- Provides opportunities for members of the Sicangu Lakota Nation to share their cultural traditions, traditional arts, skills, spiritual knowledge, and life experiences to help youth and families overcome substance abuse, expand their positive social network, and reclaim and strengthen their tribal identity (Gray, Ore de Boehm, Farnsworth, & Wolf, 2010).
- Recruits, trains, and assists teams of community members and elders to offer Takoja Niwicakiyapi (Bringing Life to the Grandchildren), a 14-week prevention program, in their communities.

6.3. Business development and sustainability

- Developed with youth detained at Wanbli Wiconi Tipi “Teca Igukinipi” (Youth Bringing Themselves to a New Beginning), a business to learn and produce Lakota traditional arts. The business has expanded to include woodworking and will soon further expand to include training and development of beekeeping and recycling projects.

6.4. Diversion from tribal court and restoration

- Promotes the restoration of indigenous practices (peacemaking, family group decision making, among others) to repair harm and divert cases from the court system.
- Implemented a First Offenders Education Program to educate youth and families to prevent further involvement in the system.

6.5. Health and well-being

- Collaborates with the Rosebud Tobacco Coalition to prevent tobacco use and promote cessation, and with the RST Diabetes Prevention Program to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity to prevent diabetes.
- Provides, in collaboration with initiative partners, Cultural Wellness Workshops, Youth Days, camps, activities, and Family Fun Nights for the community.

7. Lessons learned: “It’s all about the relationships”

1. Learning how to work together with the infusion of new resources from a private foundation introduced new patterns of working and communicating, shifted community perception, and rearranged historical patterns of community partnerships and

trust building. A feature of Western thinking is the notion of linear and hierarchical levels of organizational patterns, the power coming from the top to bottom and coming from the outside. Lakota philosophy is based on relationship with all of creation. Every creation is considered a nation (horse nation, buffalo nation, eagle nation, water nation); all work together equally with no hierarchy, and resources coming from within and shared among the nations. We needed this initiative to understand that trust is built from the bottom up, and horizontally fused and practiced and joined with resources from the outside.

2. Conflict between entities is expected and part of community change as new systems are built and old ones retrofitted. Because of the variety of disciplines involved in this type of initiative, conflicts will occur and continue to occur as development occurs. We acknowledge that conflicts are normal and that some may never be resolved, but we can accept each other, talk it out, and find ways to work around conflicts and differences if we keep the goal of helping youth and families in mind.
3. Partnerships were established between many community agencies, schools, courts, federal agencies, tribal businesses, university, churches, and existing tribal agencies. Several community groups were integrated to improve the lives of the youth and their parents in this initiative.
4. Cross-training among the various entities was introduced to reduce the stress and conflict of so many agencies working together. This technique helped in dispelling misunderstandings, myths, and rumors. It helped improve communication, fostered understanding, and provided improved services between the partners.
5. Improving communication skills, including the use of circles for more “active listening” and not always being the “most verbal” person, was helpful in building trust and thus lead to engaging people in the process.
6. Using humor, storytelling, and laughter to ease the situation and bring people together was a quintessential element of success. The youth and families were engaged with tribal elders and learned these traditions themselves.
7. Incorporating Lakota philosophy and traditional values – demonstrate courage, show fortitude, honor wisdom, be generous with time, and have faith and know everyone can be a leader in their own capacity, in their own way and time – to build capacity, bring people of different backgrounds together, and empower the natural environment was a major lesson.
8. Building on the strengths of each youth and family, rather than primarily focusing on deficits and the medical model, was equally as important as building on the strengths of Lakota culture.
9. Sharing resources through partnerships brings about creative solutions for providing quality services to meet needs, despite infrastructure and financial resource limitations.
10. The RF initiative is time limited, and the systems that were enhanced, reorganized, connected, and introduced are part of a much older system of tribal nation-to-nation to extended family that has been here for a long time, and in spite of its problems and difficulties, it is what the people know and are comfortable with. Change is a hard part of any community enhancement initiative. However, the RF initiative partnership with Rosebud Tribe has brought some new ideas and resource building to the community, and some form of these will continue to exist and evolve because of sustainability efforts made throughout the initiative time period.
11. The final lesson is understanding the meaning of the bridge of knowledge, which was built from the Rosebud Tribe to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Reclaiming Futures initiative and back again. Understanding that the concept of time is not the same, that the collective supersedes the individual, and that the nation-to-nation governmental status is paramount. RWJF/RF was

working with a different nation, thus providing a lesson for all those involved about differences and diversity.

8. Update and summary

The RWJF/Reclaiming Futures initiative is a model that was shaped in part by participation of the Rosebud Oyate Teca Owicakiya (Helping Young People) Partnership and the Sicangu Lakota Nation. Youth, families, the court, service providers, partners, and the community will continue to benefit from help they received and relationships developed through this work. In 2009, at the end of the grant, 426 youth were referred to the court. Of these, 79 were dismissed, 81 were deferred (given time to right the situation), 61 were referred to the First Offender Prevention Education Program, 38 were assigned to the Youth Wellness Drug Court (YWC), and 113 were assigned to probation. Youth assigned to YWC and probation automatically received assessment for substance abuse and other issues, and were referred for appropriate services at the front end of the system.

The court now routinely requires parents or guardians to be assessed and participate in treatment or other services based on the assessment. Family recovery programs, parenting classes, and/or anger management classes may be required as well. Cultural programs, traditional arts, and community engagement are intertwined in the recovery process. The overall goal is healthy youth and families and safe communities within a thriving Sicangu Lakota Nation. With lessons learned and acknowledging tribal nation settings and cultural differences, Reclaiming Futures is a model that can be replicated with other tribal nations with success.

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