

# Cultural Pathways for Native American Youth in Foster Care

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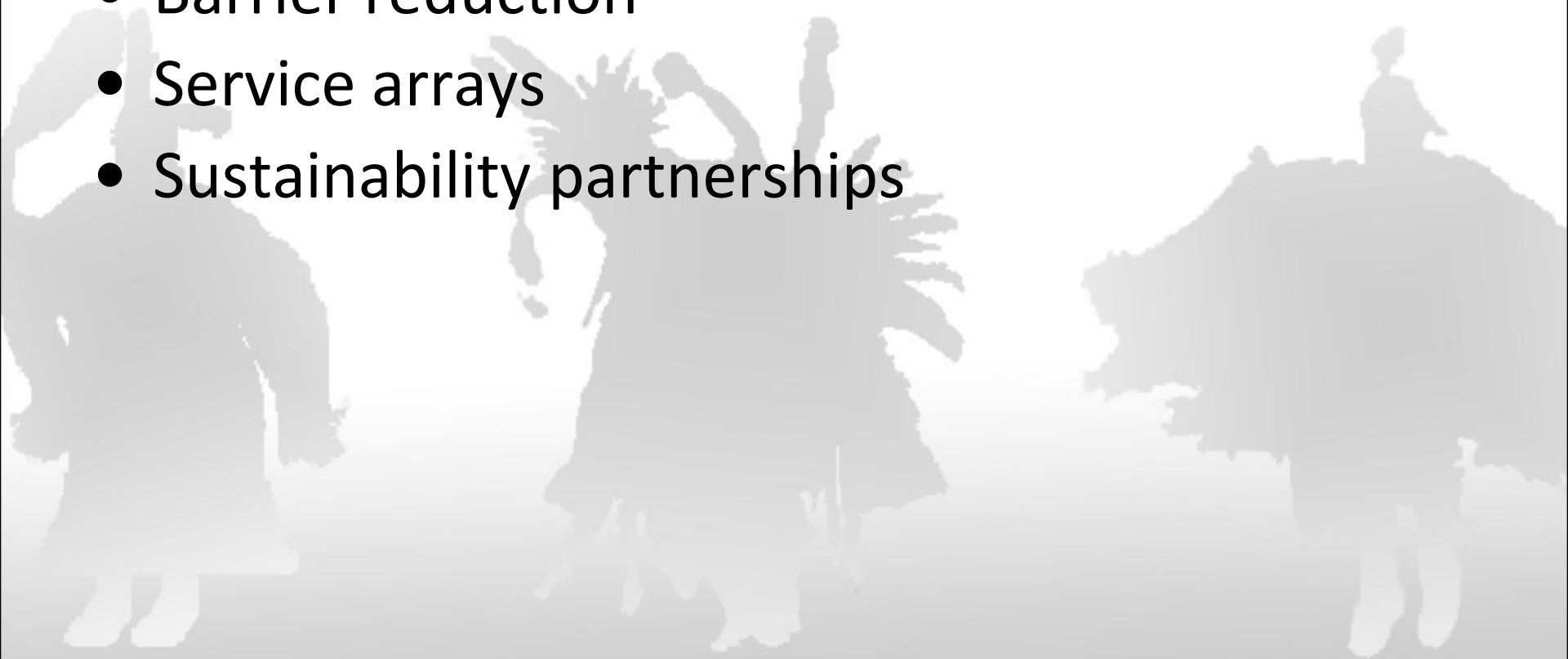
At

The Aspen Institute



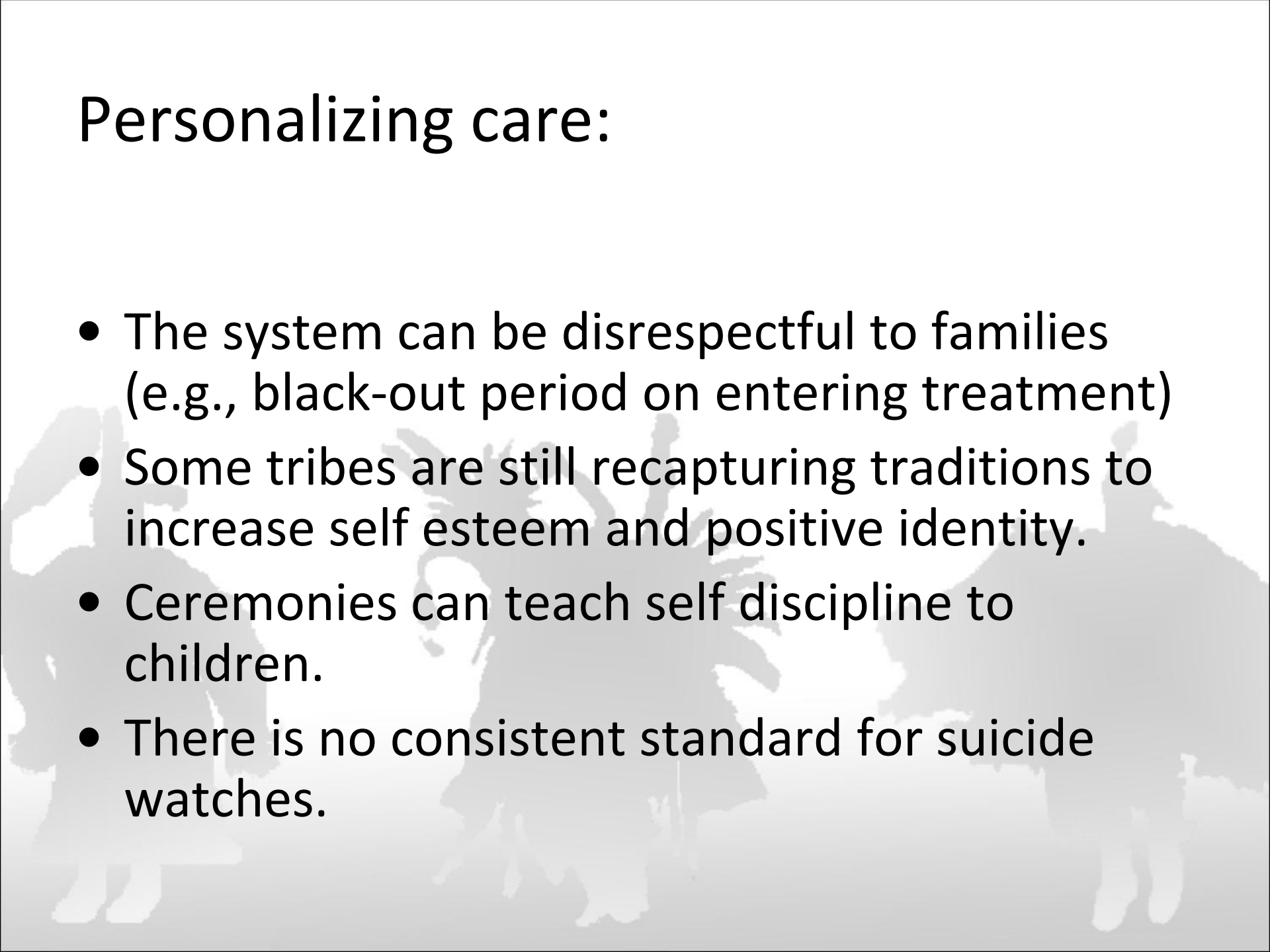
# Objectives

- To identify culture based engagement strategies
- Barrier reduction
- Service arrays
- Sustainability partnerships





# Personalizing care:

- The system can be disrespectful to families (e.g., black-out period on entering treatment)
  - Some tribes are still recapturing traditions to increase self esteem and positive identity.
  - Ceremonies can teach self discipline to children.
  - There is no consistent standard for suicide watches.
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# Personalized care continued

- Storytelling and participation in crafts can be important to establishing trust with families, as opposed to 50 minute office visits.
- Cultural identity also involves identification with the land and subsistence activities, i.e., fish camps in Alaska.
- Indian Country has potentially explosive issues around blood quantum, “color”, and levels of acculturation.
- The Medicaid billing code for targeted case management supports home-based wraparound and is consistent with tribal values.

# Personalized care continued

- CMHS funded *Circles of Care* and Systems of Care (SOC) grants with tribes have revealed a common value that *children are sacred*.
- Urban Indian youth may hide their cultural identity for safety if surrounded by a gang culture.
- Tribal sovereignty must be a recognized component for all initiatives.
- Current epidemic rates of suicide in Indian Country have promoted federal (CMHS/SAMHSA) recognition & support for the integration of culture based traditional healing practices with western treatment.



*...before we can presume to know how to help Native communities in culturally appropriate ways, we must first study the cultural underpinnings of wellness from the perspective of contemporary community members (Gone, 2004, p. 14).*





# Background



- Role of American Indian (AI) elders
  - Keepers and transmitters of knowledge (Wexler, 2011)
  - Endured many adversities (Grandbois & Sanders, 2009)
  - Life stories hold life lessons and foundational knowledge to better understand resilience
- Youth in today's society
  - Disconnect between elders and youth (Wexler, 2011)
  - Urban AI youth face greater challenges connecting with elders (Stumblingbear-Riddle, 2012)
  - Previous research acknowledges that ties to culture and other variables (i.e. social support) may be protective and lead to resilient outcomes for positive youth development (LaFromboise et al., 2006; Wexler, 2011)

# Protective intergenerational strategies

- Spirituality
- Tribal identity
- Elders
- Ceremonies and rituals
- Humor
- Oral tradition
- Family
- Support networks



(HeavyRunner and Morris, 1997)

- **What protective strategies can elders offer to enhance resiliency among urban American Indian/Alaska Native youth?**

# Results: Literature re

- Protective factors

- Resilience

- Understanding elders resilience

- Intergenerational relationships

- Family/community/collective connectedness

- Culture

- Storytelling, activities, sense of belonging, sense-making

- Spirituality

- Higher power, God



# Qualitative and Meta-analysis

- Literature search and qualitative data from elder's narratives helped identify key resiliency factors uniquely specific for urban AI youth
  - Strengths in knowing history and roots
- Adults and elders views on culture were different from youth
  - Adults & elders: Culture is a collective experience; draw from intergenerational strengths/ practice; get strength from those who came before; feeling grounded
  - Youth: Culture was related to specific activities/skills; culture is slipping away; had cultural strengths but didn't know it
- Oppressive policies have disrupted the relationship between youth and their Elders

# Recommendations

- Strategies for enhancing resilience among youth
  - intergenerational communication (stories about historical trauma and elder resilience)
  - Teach youth how culture can be a sustaining force and how it is linked to strengths (personal to collective) to overcome challenges
- Appropriate methods: Storytelling and narratives are culturally relevant methods that can be combined in CBPR approaches
- Future research: Increase funding and opportunities for public health research to explore how culture fosters resilience among urban American Indians
- Tribal opportunities—self-determination policies (include elders in schools)

# What's Wrong with the Dominant Narrative?

- Existing negative narratives set and controlled by non-Natives.
- Overwhelmingly tends to use deficit-framing
  - • Native American community framed as deficits or burdens to society
  - • Research shows deficit frames are harmful psychologically

Narratives = create individual's perception of Native Americans  
and their interpretation of facts

Narratives often shaped by media, popular culture, education  
curricula, etc.

Individuals draw on these limited narratives to make sense of  
“other” groups and themselves



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“Native Americans have the highest poverty rate.”

Native American communities suffer from obesity, diabetes, and suicide.



# Asset vs Deficit Framing

## Asset

A community starts out with value but has fallen short of its potential.

## Deficit

Focuses on shortcomings. Requires needing to first prove a community is essentially human and has added value to society.

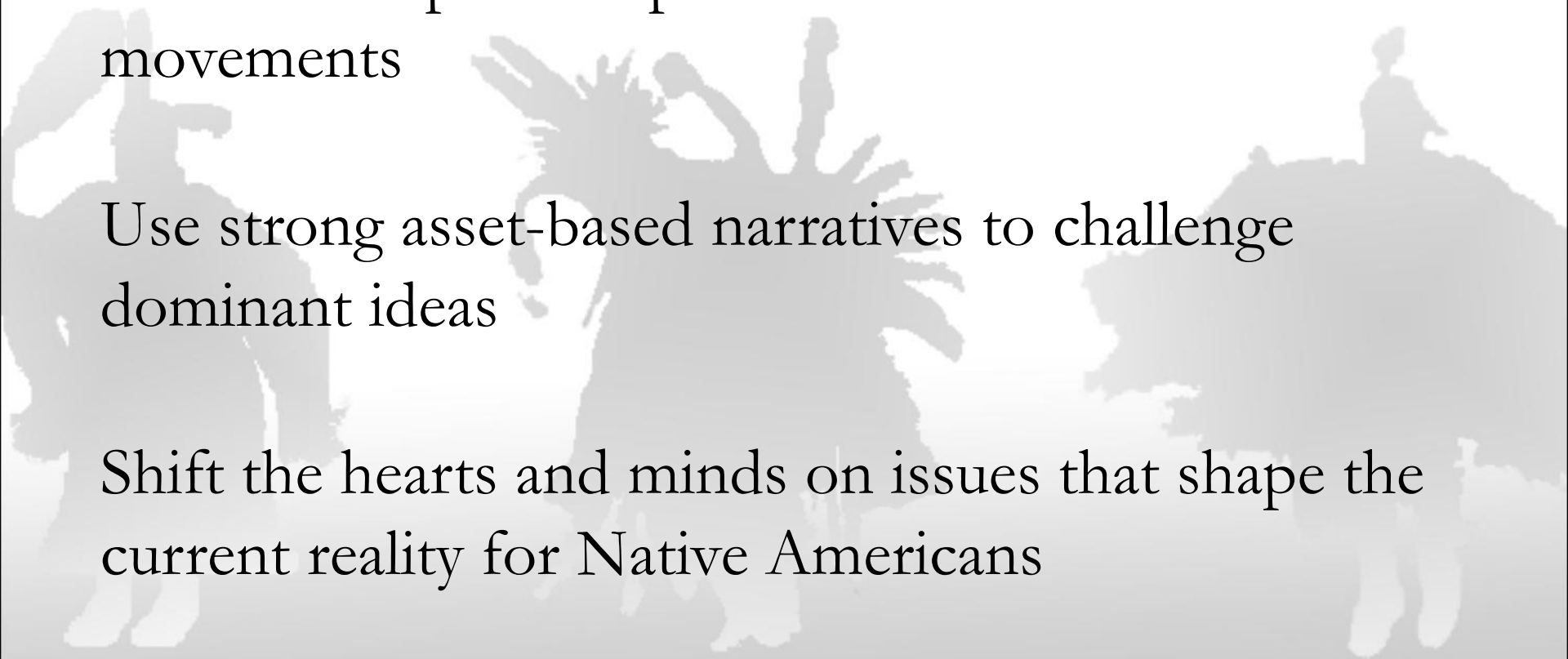


## Narrative Change Work Seeks to:

Reframe and change stories in dominant culture to create more political possibilities for social movements

Use strong asset-based narratives to challenge dominant ideas

Shift the hearts and minds on issues that shape the current reality for Native Americans



## CULTURAL DEPRESSION IN NATIVE AMERICAN FAMILLIES

The destruction of the native family has happened in four major ways:

1. Massive separation of native children from their families through foster care placement and hundreds of Indian children sent to boarding schools.
2. Loss of the power of self-determination. (As one Native states, "there is a difference in people telling us what to do, rather than asking us what would help. Government programs that foster dependence make us angry at ourselves and destroy our self-esteem.")
3. Stigma of the culture and resulting cultural self hate.
4. Alcoholism.

# Boarding School Effects

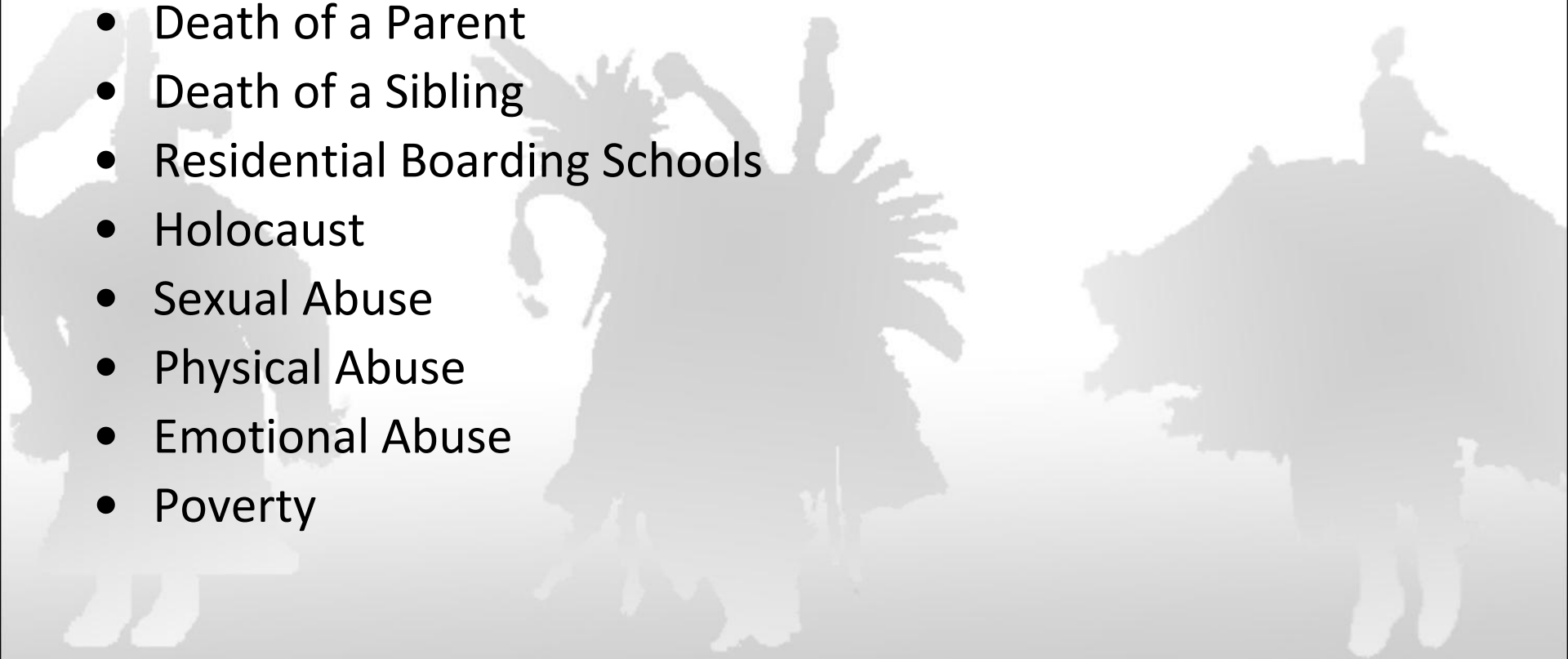


this vision not applied to all reservations, it was often not consistently applied within a single community. As Longbear, a Crow tribesman from Montana, com-



# Intergenerational transmitted traumas

- Parental Alcoholism
- Parental substance abuse
- War
- Death of a Parent
- Death of a Sibling
- Residential Boarding Schools
- Holocaust
- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Poverty



# Effects of Unresolved Trauma

repetition compulsion

shame

detachment

live in past or future

anniversary reactions

depression

lack spontaneity

repetitive relationship patterns

being controlled

panic attacks

substance abuse

survival guilt

hypervigilance

compulsive behaviors

body pain/illness

fear death is imminent

counter-dependence

repression

vulnerability to loss

fear of the ordinary

## Child Abuse and Neglect

- Alcohol abuse, related to child abuse and neglect, is more likely to be reported for AI/AN families.
- AI/AN children appear to be more likely than Caucasian children to be placed in foster care.
- Approximately 1 substantiated report of a child victim of abuse or neglect for every 30 AI/AN children.
- Among women who had children placed in substitute care by child welfare, AI/AN families were the only group that seemed to have more negative child welfare outcomes (e.g., longer length of stay in substitute care and placement outcomes).
- Violence is more likely to be reported among AI/AN families, both as an element of abuse and/or neglect and in general.



# Pre-adolescents and Adolescents (12-18 years)

- Self-consciousness
- Life-threatening reenactment
- Rebellion at home or school
- Abrupt shift in relationships
- Depression and social withdrawal
- Decline in school performance
- Trauma-driven acting out, such as with sexual activity and reckless risk taking
- Effort to distance oneself from feelings of shame, guilt, and humiliation
- Excessive activity and involvement with others, or retreat from others in order to manage inner turmoil
- Accident proneness
- Wish for revenge and action-oriented responses to trauma
- Increased self-focusing and withdrawal
- Sleep and eating disturbances, including nightmares

# Practice Based Evidence (PBE)

- Community accepted healing approaches
- Evaluation of the PBE & “certification” of the provider is provided by the community!
- Western-based mental health practices must be integrated into the culture (PBE) rather than the reverse (adding culture to the EBP).

# Modern cultural issues

- Youth gang cultures, pop culture, and technology/You Tube/My Space etc.
- Social issues resulting from casino's & gaming
- FAS/FAE youth with impulse control & legal issues
- Dramatic increase & misuse of prescription drugs
- New populations of veterans with potential for PTSD impacting family relationships
- Racism and violence a reality in rural reservation communities

# Barrier reduction strategies

- Workforce training, of tribal members with expertise in both mental health and cultural nuances specific to the community, involving tribal colleges and universities.
- Expand and support community-based counselor training programs (e.g., UAF's Village Based Counselor training program).
- Scheduled clinical supervision and cultural consultation agreements between paraprofessional and licensed staff, possibly with telemedicine for remote locations.

## Barrier reduction strategies (continued):

- Honor family choice for support system, spiritual, extended family, tribal, IHS, or mainstream programs and churches for increased anonymity.
- Staff training to emphasize strength-based assessments & treatment planning & inclusion of cultural supports.
- Multidisciplinary family led treatment planning, with strict HIPPA compliance.

# Culture-Based Engagement Strategies:

- Consultation on the local protocols for approaching elders for cultural and spiritual advice
- Due to boarding schools and relocation policies, urban families and some reservation families may be re-learning and building cultural identity and practices.
- Circles of Care grantees redefined Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED), to a local definition of a well child, based on tribal values.
- Lakota and Athabascan assessment scales have been developed during System of Care (SOC) projects.

# Culture-based Engagement Strategies (cont.):

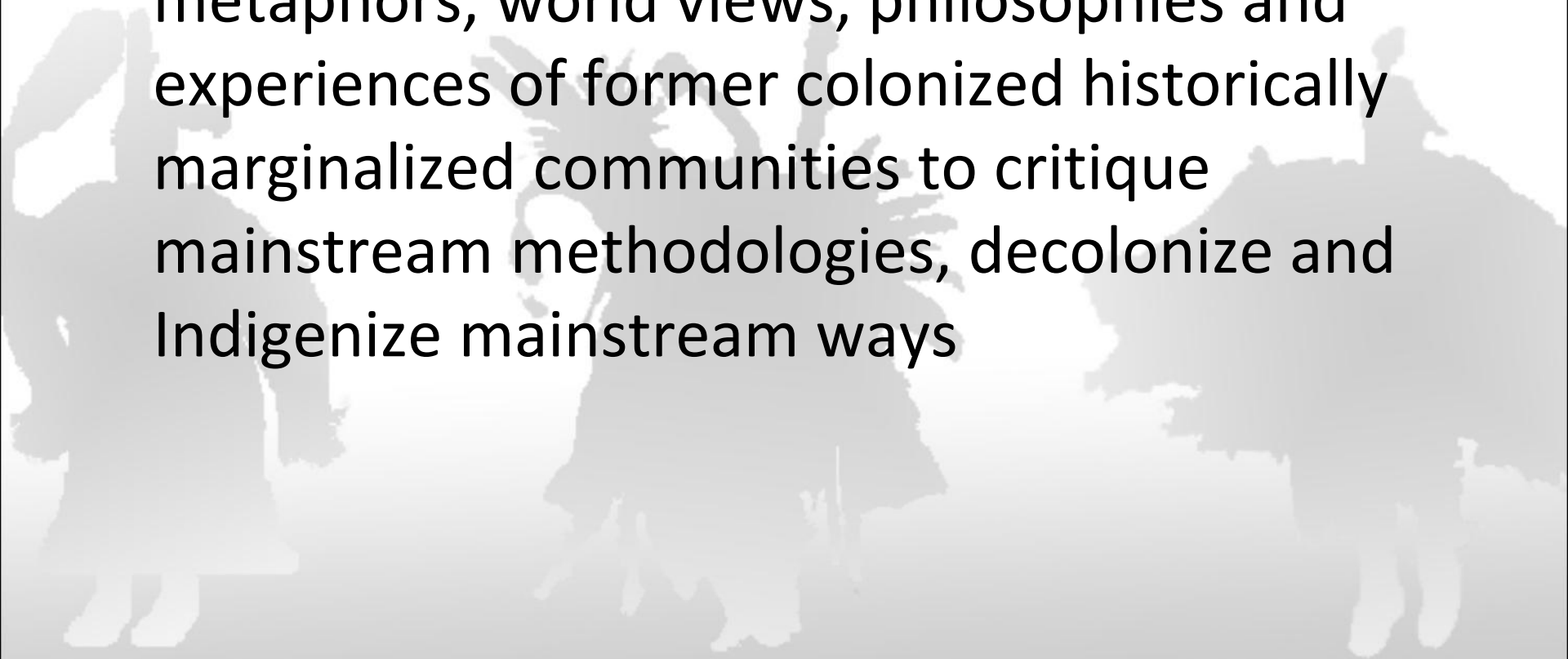
- Urban programs & some acculturated tribal communities are recreating traditional ceremonies & practices - helping youth & families to learn tribal history, language & culture.
- Re-introduce tribal rites of passage ceremonies to reduce teen pregnancies and support sobriety.
- 12 Step programs encourage spiritual education & practices.
- Equine therapy fits well with tribal culture.
- Many tribes are using their own resources for cultural immersion programs, i.e., fish camps in Alaska

# Indigenizing Spaces

- Indigenizing allows for relationships to be defined by life experience
- Implementing Indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing, and being within the organization products, materials
- It is asserting the significance and application of Indigenous knowledge within all things.



- Cultural interventions that draw from Indigenous Knowledge, histories, languages, metaphors, world views, philosophies and experiences of former colonized historically marginalized communities to critique mainstream methodologies, decolonize and Indigenize mainstream ways



# Paradigm Shift

- ✓ Tribal communities have begun to see their world views, values and beliefs not as outdated, but as invaluable **cultural survival mechanisms**.
- ✓ Today historical spiritual beliefs and traditional healing practices of Tribes are now being recognized as **culturally specific community interventions**.
- ✓ Since the establishment of education, the use of western based protocols all but eliminated traditional Tribal healing practices and knowledge.

# Promoting Culturally Safe Spaces

- Indigenize spaces
- Hear our voices
- Recognizing colonization and its impact
- Be sensitive to and aware of dynamics of power, privilege and oppression
- Build relationships
- Advocate for change



