

## **Healing of the Canoe: the Community Pulling Together**

A Collaborative Community Based Participatory Research Project  
The Suquamish Tribe & the University of Washington

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### *Topic Area of Research*

Alcohol and drug abuse represent major areas of concern for many American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) communities. Research on these problems has been less than fully successful, in part because it has often been conducted by academicians who were not fully appreciative of or sensitive to the sovereign status or the cultural and traditional approaches of the Tribes and communities with whom they were working. They also often failed to respect Tribal sovereignty or to incorporate Tribal customs, traditions, and values into the interventions developed to deal with substance abuse problems. In addition to this, most evidence-based practices regarding substance abuse prevention and treatment have not been tested with urban, rural, or reservation AIAN communities.

The *Healing of the Canoe: the Community Pulling Together* (HOC) is a three-year project funded by the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD). This project is a partnership between the Suquamish Tribe and the University of Washington Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute (ADAI). The overall goal of HOC is to work collaboratively with the Suquamish Tribe to plan, implement, and evaluate a project that meets the unique needs and builds on the strengths and resources of the Tribal community. The purpose of this project is to reduce health disparities and promote health in the Suquamish Tribe. This project has been approved by the Suquamish Tribal Council and the Suquamish Culture Co-op serves as the Advisory Council. Specifically, the Tribe has asked that the project develop an intervention focused on reducing youth substance abuse and enhancing a sense of meaning and belonging to the Tribal community.

This project utilizes Community Based Participatory Research/Tribal Participatory (CBPR/TPR) methods to insure that *every* aspect of the research is done in a respectful and effective manner. CBPR/TPR requires that the target community be involved in each stage of the research including: identifying the issues of concern; identifying appropriate methods; complying with both Tribal and research institution Institutional Review Board requirements; shared ownership of data; designing/adapting/implementing interventions; identifying and measuring appropriate outcomes; analyzing and interpreting results; and dissemination of findings.

The HOC partners are also interested in understanding the quality of the collaborative relationship between the Tribal community and the research institution as well as the perceptions of collaboration of both partners. Therefore, the project has developed measures to pilot in years 2 and 3 to provide data about the respective partners' sense of contribution and to provide feedback and guidance order to better insure a respectful balance of ownership of the research project.

### *Preliminary Summary of Findings*

The Healing of the Canoe: the Community Pulling Together is in the second of three years. During Year One the project conducted a needs and resources assessment. Using the Community Readiness Model, interviews were conducted with stakeholders in the Tribal community. Additionally, focus groups were held with four groups: Elders, Youth, Service Providers, and community members. Qualitative data gathered in these interviews and focus groups were summarized and analyzed by the community-based and

university-based project teams. Preliminary findings were presented to the Community Advisory Council and Tribal Council for review and input. A comprehensive needs and resources report has been drafted based on the findings of the interviews and focus groups as well as a user-friendly brochure that summarizes the report. This report has been presented to the Tribal Council and Advisory Council and mailed to members of the Tribal community.

Key findings from this report indicate that preventing youth substance abuse and the associated negative consequences is the number one priority of the community. The second most important issue is developing and enhancing a sense of meaning and belonging to the Suquamish Tribe. Additionally, respondent's stated that important Tribal resources included the youth, the Elders, Tribal leaders, and Tribally based services as well as specific Native activities and traditions. Respondents also stated that incorporating traditional cultural practices and linking youth to respected community members as mentors were important to include in the intervention.

Data from the measures of the quality of the collaborative relationship have just begun to be collected. Preliminary results indicate that the CBPR/TPR approach being used in the HOC project is supportive of a collaborative relationship between the Tribe and ADAI/UW in which the community partners feel respected as full partners in the research project.

A preliminary model of the project's treatment components, protective factors, and outcome measures will be shared.

*Practical Implications of the Research for Tribal Communities*

- Tribal communities are full partners in research projects that are relevant and appropriate to the community;
- Research is conducted on topics of importance to the target Tribal community;
- Research staff are hired in the community;
- Research capacity is built within Tribal communities;
- Culturally competent and effective services provided to Tribal communities are informed by research;
- Additionally, development of the relationship between the Tribal community and the research institution will be discussed as well as key aspects of sustaining the collaborative relationship;
- Materials developed for this project will be discussed, including a Memorandum of Understanding, a Tribal Resolution, letters of support, work agreements and scope of work descriptions, and draft questionnaires and measures;
- Research findings inform the development of the intervention and outcome measures to insure cultural and community appropriateness and relevance;


- Research findings (e.g. focus group findings) can be used by Tribal Councils, Cultural Councils, and other Tribal agencies to be responsive to the needs of their communities.

*Policy and/or practice relevance of the research*

- Sovereign status of Tribal communities is observed in research;
- Best practices that are effective for Tribal communities can be developed and disseminated;
- Tribal communities are informed gatekeepers regarding which research is allowed into their communities;
- Researchers are required to demonstrate cultural competence prior to working with Tribal communities.

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The Community Pulling Together




Preventing Youth Substance Abuse and Promoting Cultural Identity and Belonging

National Congress of American Indians  
NCAI Policy Research Center Tribal Leaders/Scholars Forum  
June 12, 2007


Gunalcheésh

- Suquamish Tribe and Community
- Suquamish Tribal Council
- Suquamish Cultural Co-operative
- Suquamish Curriculum Development Group
- Suquamish Wellness Program
- Suquamish Community Members




Gunalcheésh

- Robin L.W. Sigo, MSW (Suquamish)
- Lisa Jackson (Suquamish/Lummi)
- Gidget Lincoln, BA (Athabaskan)
- Dennis Donovan, PhD
- Lisette Austin, MA
- Heather Lonczak, PhD
- Lisa R. Thomas, PhD (Tlingit)




- Substance abuse
- Cultural identity and belonging
- Why research?
- Community Pulling Together project
- CBPR/TPR
- Community knowledge
- Community expertise
- Community ownership
- True collaboration?
- Implication and relevance



Substance Abuse in Indian Country

- High priority concern in Indian Country
- Substance abuse is a health disparity
- Little attention to those AIAN individuals and communities without substance abuse
- Research had been ineffective and often disrespectful
- Current "best practices" have not been shown to be effective in Indian country

Cultural Identity and Belonging



- What does it mean to be a member of my Tribe and my community?
- The literature is inconclusive regarding cultural identity as risk or protective factor
- What does Indigenous testimony tell us?

## Why Research?



Ann Mendenhall RedwaveMedia  
2006

## Why Research?

- To understand and document the health disparities experienced by AIAN's
- To understand and document the traditional strengths, resources, teachings, practices, beliefs, values and science that Native people have used for thousands of years to promote good health
- To decolonize and Indigenize research

## Community Pulling Together The Healing of the Canoe

- Full partnership between the Suquamish Tribe and the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute at the U of WA
- 3 year project funded by NIH/NCMHD
- Uses Community Based Participatory Research
- Address issue(s) of concern to the community
- Build on strengths and resources in the community
- Incorporate traditions and beliefs of the community

## Community Based Participatory Research/Tribal Participatory Research

- Full partnership
- Community is involved in each phase of the research
- Culturally respectful, appropriate, relevant
- Shared ownership of the data
- Opportunities for "cross-training"
- Project staff are hired in the community
- Increased community ownership and engagement
- Sustainability



"Now that we are all here, I'd like to suggest that we begin imposing ourselves."

## Community Expertise and Guidance

- Approval, guidance and support of Tribal Council
- Community advisory councils provide oversight and guidance
- Key stakeholder interviews
- Focus groups with key stakeholders
- Identify key issue(s) of concern and resources to address concern(s)
  - Youth substance abuse and a sense of meaning and belonging as a Tribal and community member
- Intervention development and adaptation groups

### Community Knowledge

- Community understands the issues AND the strengths
- Life skills curriculum that is based on Tribal values, beliefs, practices, traditions and stories
  - 12 sessions
  - Piloted in Suquamish summer school
- Community provides the key components of the intervention
- Community identifies if and how the intervention is successful

### Community Ownership

- Consistent and ongoing communication
  - Newsletters
  - Community meetings
  - Presentations to Elder's Council, Youth Council, Tribal Council, etc.
- Project "transparency"
- Open door policy
- Community members as co-researchers

### True Collaboration?

- Historically research institutions have engaged in "helicopter" research
- How do we insure and document true collaboration?
- Developed measures
  - Individual Perceptions
  - Wilder Inventory
  - Meeting Effectiveness
- Qualitative information
- Community participation

### Quality of the collaborative relationship

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| • My viewpoint is heard                                     | • Mutual respect, understanding and trust    |
| • I feel comfortable  | • Ability to compromise                      |
| • I am satisfied with the progress                          | • Shared vision                              |
| • I am viewed as a valued member                            | • Clear roles                                |
| • I am satisfied with the degree of community participation | • Appropriate inclusion of community members |
|   | • Open communication                         |
|   | • Strong leadership                          |

### Community Pulling Together

- CBPR with full partnership
- Needs and resources report
- Life Skills Curriculum intervention
  - Canoe metaphor
  - Suquamish beliefs, traditions, values, practices and stories
- Attend to the collaborative relationship
- Tribal ownership and oversight



Lisa Jackson

### Practical Implications and Relevance

- Sovereign status of the Tribes is recognized
- Tribal communities are full partners in research that is relevant and appropriate
- Focus on issues of importance to the community
- Research staff are hired in the community
- Research capacity is enhanced
- Culturally competent, appropriate and effective services are identified or developed
- Findings can be used by Tribal agencies

### Practical Implications and Relevance

- Respectful collaborative relationships developed between Tribes and research institutions
- Tribal communities are informed gatekeepers
- Researchers must demonstrate cultural competency and respect
- Research is Indigenized

