

NURTURING THE SPIRIT OF ICWA: REINFORCING POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR
INDIGENOUS CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT

By

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A Project Presented to

The Faculty of Humboldt State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

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May 2016

Abstract

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The disproportionate representation of Indigenous children placed out of the home through the child welfare system indicate a greater need for Placement Care Providers (PCP) with the capacity for integration, education and connection to native heritage and tradition. The purpose of this project is to increase support for Indigenous PCP's and tribally approved placements. Learning from the knowledge of Indigenous PCP can support the integration, education and connection to native heritage and tradition for Indigenous youth in placement. The experiences of current PCP's can provide child welfare agencies and affiliate organizations with the perspectives of a critical resource in meeting the needs of the Indigenous children they are responsible for serving. These experiences were shared through a semi-structured interview, which was recorded and transcribed. The inductive analysis of the qualitative data collected produced four consistent themes, which were collaboration, trainings focused on meeting needs of the child, facilitation of peer support, and clear and directive communication.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my committee Yvonne Doble, Geneva Shaw, Blair Kreuzer and the amazing participants who shared their experiences and stories with me. It has been with their vision, encouragement and guidance that I have forged a path, which will forever mark the way for the children of my family and their children's children. This project, which was once the seed of a conversation has taken root and blossomed into the manuscript you now read due to the contribution of my committee and the project participants. Thank you. I would also like to acknowledge my children, Kiahna and Aleryk who have supported my process and my project with their support, love and sacrifice. My love for them has been a driving force and inspiration when this journey seemed bigger than my ability. I would like to acknowledge both of my families the one I was born into and the one I have been blessed to accumulate along the way. Without their input, love, guidance and support this project could not have happened. It was with their encouragement that I was strengthened not only to persevere but also to dig deep and take the risks. Thank you!! Finally I would like to acknowledge my Cohort 13- extended. It is the wonderful experience of sharing this journey with them that has stretched my mind, heart and soul beyond words. I am grateful and in appreciation of the footprint each one of them have left on my heart and spirit. It is because of their love and supports that I stand confidently at this marker in life and my process and continue to step forward.

Cohort Love!

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Introduction

The purpose of this project is to outline the importance of supporting tribally approved placements for Native children involved with child welfare services. Emphasizing the connection between placement success and positive outcomes substantiates the need to increase and improve strategies to support recruitment, retention and support for current tribally approved Placement Care Providers (PCP). The disconnection of Native people and communities from the upbringing of their children has taken on different forms over centuries of “good intentions”. From the missions, through the boarding school experiences and to the current child welfare system that “intervenes” with the removal of native children at alarmingly high rates the cycle of trauma continues to be perpetuated through policies and procedures, (Bouvier, 2001; Lidot, Orrantia, & Choca, 2012; Cross, 2008).

The historical trauma inflicted on Indigenous people, in North America included disruption in families, which created rifts in the generational experience of passing down culture, parenting traditions and the personal engagement of love. Historical trauma defined refers to cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, extending over an individual lifespan and across generations, caused by traumatic experiences (Brave Heart, 2016; Lidot et.al, 2012). With the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare (ICWA), came hope in the healing and restorative intention of ICWA for native communities. The stark failure of ICWA’s intention and implementation is evident in the drastic disproportionate representation of Native children and families subjected to the “good

intentions” of policies, procedures and the government intervention of child welfare agencies. The purpose of this project to embrace the spirit of ICWA by nurturing the support of placement care providers entrusted with care, healing and the future of Indigenous prosperity.

Forced Settlement

The colonization of North America was the result of systematic dispossession and inhumane regard for its Indigenous inhabitants. In *The American Indian Holocaust*, Brave Heart and DeBruyn, utilize definitions and the characteristics of the Jewish Holocaust to discuss the systematic attempts of annihilation committed against the Indigenous inhabitants by the European “settlers”, (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). This ongoing process of domination, by the Euro-centric powers, of the land, its resources, inhabitants and its history was initiated through the religious and “helping” agenda of the missions, as discussed in “Women and the conquest of California, 1542-1840: Codes of silence,” by Virginia Bouvier in 2001. With the founding principles of the missions vilifying Native culture and belief systems as “savage” and “uncivilized” the first steps to creating a colonized mainstream through “settlement” were initiated through the invasion, “discovery” and conquest of California, (Bouvier, 2001). The propagandized identity, outlined by Bouvier, of Indigenous people was promoted as justification for the enslavement, horrific crimes against humanity and attempted genocide committed against the Indigenous inhabitants of North America (Bouvier, 2001; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). The “settlement” of the Americas hinged on the attempted genocide of a society

and a people in order to establish a colonized Eurocentric system of domination and ownership.

Boarding Schools

The historical trauma of “settlement” and colonization has been inflicted by a series of systematic and institutional trends structured and implemented by the disillusioned values of Eurocentric “supremacy”. This disruption in family structure combined with the abuse and isolation of the boarding school experience resulted in psychological, emotional and familial traumas that are directly passed through generations in the behaviors and beliefs developed to cope with the trauma (Adams, 1995). In 500 Nations, the 2006 documentary directed by John Leustig and produced by Kevin Costner, the personal accounts of the boarding school experience spoke to the loss of identity, the imposed self-hatred and the faded memories of their connection to family and self (Leustig, 2006).

Spiritually and emotionally, the children were bereft of culturally integrated behaviors that led to positive self-esteem, a sense of belonging to family and community, and a solid American Indian identity. When these children became adults, they were ill prepared for raising their own children in a traditional American Indian context (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, p.64, 1998). This attack on Native children served as a significant and efficient component to the attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples through the deconstruction of their children and their legacy.

Disproportionality

Today the discourse of alarm for Native children, families and communities is their disproportionate representation in the child welfare system and the stark outcomes this creates for their prosperity. Attempts to correlate this disproportionate representation in child welfare to poverty and substance abuse are not supported in the statistical data and continue to be perpetuated as a truth (Santana, 2014).

“For example, of 100 white children that come to the attention of Child Protective Services (CPS) intake, 25 will be substantiated and 8 will be eventually placed in substitute care. Of 100 American Indian children coming to the attention of non–American Indian CPS agencies, 50 will be substantiated and 25 will be placed,” (Cross p. 12, 2008).

The myth that the constraints of poverty, which plague native communities account for higher rates of child maltreatment are dispelled in the statistical data outlined in the examination of disproportionality compiled by Crofoot and Harris. These authors go onto address the “real culprit” of prejudice and ignorance in the midst of “good intentions,” (Crofoot & Harris, 2012).

Spirit of ICWA

The advocacy that laid the foundation for the 1978 enactment of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was culminated in the critical need for cultural persistence and the extension of federally established sovereignty to Indian Children and families. ICWA is

law. The mandates of ICWA are guidelines to create accountability and reinforce the follow through of best practice and the active efforts to serving Indigenous people. In his article Cross challenges the belief that “Child welfare offers something superior-a better life or more hopeful future. History would indicate that we cannot be so sure” (Cross, p. 14, 2008). Social workers for state systems are often under educated regarding both the purpose and protocol of implementing ICWA, though they bear the responsibility to do so. These social workers must understand that ICWA is a remedial act, that "responds to the many years of removal of Indian children from their families, reservations, culture, and tribal values,” (Lidot et. al, p. 77, 2012).

“The spirit of the ICWA is not only to broaden the principle of best interest beyond the individualistic basis but also to assert that the balancing act that any determination of best interest entails should be the responsibility of the tribal community in question” (Strong p. 210, 2005).

It is the culmination of these beliefs and the need for healing the trauma in Native families by revitalizing the healing and restoration of ICWA’s spirit through the support of tribally approved PCP. ICWA is a spirit. The real strength of ICWA is in the healing spirit of conscious service delivery. Knowing that the trauma of the past has not faded with time. ICWA is a reminder that active efforts, cultural humility and reinforcing the strengths of the Indigenous clients we serve strengthen Indigenous communities.

The Role of Culture

Identifying the cultural and racial identities of the children placed in care can increase access to knowing the roots of their identities, their history, culture and traditions. “There is evidence that cultural awareness training can promote confidence and cultural competence among foster parents,”(Brown, Arnault, George & Sintzel, p. 108, 2009). Enculturation is the embodiment of sense of self and was demonstrated in correlation to increases in coping abilities and higher self esteem outcomes (Santana, 2014). Without the recognition by the PCP of the experiences shaped by racial and cultural identity, isolation can perpetuate other mal adaptive outcomes (Rootes, 2014). The racial and cultural awareness of the PCP can create a receptive and nurturing environment to foster the over all well being and development of the children they care for.

In the fulfillment of racial and ethnic awareness comes the expectation of the PCP to broaden exposure and experiences that will support the composition of their household. This responsibility is most effectively supported when child welfare agencies partner with Native agencies and community-based providers to incorporate cultural values, traditions, spirituality, and kinship practices in services (Bussey & Lucero, 2013). The integration of knowledge substantiates the need for action and engagement in the enculturation process, which is essential for healthy individual and relational development (Rootes, 2014; Santana, 2014). In the experience of Native American children, enculturation positively correlated to life satisfaction, which is an indicator of

healthy coping, decision- making and successful transition into adulthood (Santana, 2014).

The Vision

In reviewing previous works on contributing factors to positive outcomes for Indigenous foster youth, there is limited research on the correlation between the positive experience of out-of- home care providers and the children placed in their home. Discussed throughout the literature are the stark outcomes for Indigenous youth in placement; isolation, loss of culture and traditions, disconnect from their identity, decrease in the resiliency, hopelessness and higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation, (Santana, 2014). The vision for this project was to reinforce placement care providers through the agencies they engage with to support an environment that can negate the stark statistics and foster hope, opportunity and resiliency.

“Some foster placements clearly succeed: the foster children are happy, they are loved in a way that does not threaten their attachment to their families, their behavior improves, their school sends back glowing reports. Other placements fail: behavior gets worse, the carers ask that the child be removed, perhaps there are accusations of abuse,” (Sinclair & Wilson, p. 371, 2003).

In between the discourse of bleak outcomes for Indigenous youth in foster placement and the success or failure of those placements, emerges an opportunity to

reinforce a bridge to success for these Indigenous youth and their communities. It is the vision and hope of this project that this space be utilized to listen and learn from placement care providers. Utilizing these shared experiences to shape and inform social service agencies support of the placement care providers, entrusted to care for the hope and future of Indigenous communities, can improve the quality of experiences for children, families and communities.

Methodology

The methodology of this project is grounded in the relational worldview because of the project's design emphasis on the shared experiences of its participants. Utilizing the inductive analysis method created the space to obtain the data related to the objectives of the project using a semi-structured format. Although there were identified objectives to the overall project the interviews were intended to be open platforms for the placement care providers to share their experiences and provide relevant data for the project. The recorded interview and the inductive analysis approach allowed for the participants to collectively define themes related to the project objectives. This structure for organizing and analyzing the data included the use of direct participants quotes, which supported the voice of their experiences in the outcome of the project results.

Framework

In this study the experiences of Placement Care Providers (PCP) are embedded in their stories and in conjunction with the relational context to the Indigenous youth they care for. The approach was grounded in the relational worldview, as defined by Terry Cross in "Understanding the Relational Worldview in Indian Families," (Cross, 2007). "Worldview" is a term used to describe the collective thought process of a people or culture,"(Cross, p. 2, 2007). The approach and objective of the project was to support the placement care providers as a method of creating the contextual, physical, mental and

spiritual balance addressed in the quadrants of the relational worldview theory (Cross, 2007). In shifting the perspective of the PCP to an expansion of life experience for the Indigenous youth placed in their care there is an opportunity to negate the disconnect of compartmentalization and foster the wholeness and balance of the youth.

The four quadrants of the relational worldview, as defined by Cross, are context, mental, physical and spiritual. The first quadrant represents the balance of context and the integration of engagement and connection to family, community, and society. This includes the influences that contribute to the balance of who they are and how they cope (Cross, 2007). The second quadrant represents mental balance and incorporates the “self talk” and story telling of Indian ways. “In passing on the stories of our lives, we pass on skills to our children, and we parent for resiliency,” (Cross, p. 3, 2007). The third quadrant represents the physical contribution to well being. “While, for the individual, we think of the physical area as concerning the body, it also refers to the family structure and roles,” (Cross, p. 3, 2007). The fourth quadrant focuses on the spiritual component to balance. “Spiritual influences in the family include both positive and negative learned practices,” (Cross, p. 4, 2007). Achieving balance in the spiritual quadrant is not about the wrong or right of religion, but in the balancing of the individual’s collective spirit. Even as the relational worldview is increasingly applicable in effective service delivery, in order to effectively function in most western agencies an understanding of the linear process is necessary in navigating collaboration (Cross, 2007).

Recruitment

A northern California tribal social service agency identified the initial pool of Placement Care Providers (PCP) to receive the recruitment/ invitation email. In the email, identified care providers had the option of sharing the information with others, which follows a snowball methodology of recruitment. Participants selected to share their experience were to be tribal approved PCP, who provided full time care for a Native American child in their home. An initial pool of 10 perspective participants were identified and contacted by phone to gauge their interest in participation and obtain verbal consent to email the recruitment material (ie. recruitment email, consent form, project description and details of participation) for further review. Once participants confirmed receipt of materials appointment times and locations were based on the schedules and convenience of the participants.

Project Design

The initial project design was to include two separate focus groups for the purpose of accommodating care providers in two locations. A doodle poll was sent out to schedule the first group at the convenience of the participants, however it soon became apparent that amending the project to individual interviews would increase participation. The questions that structured the interaction are as follows:

1. What has been the most helpful support outside of your family to providing out-of home placement?
2. Once you were identified as a possible placement, did you receive guidance, support or any assistance in that process?
3. How has social services supported your ability to provide care?
4. What suggestions would you like to make to social services in supporting other Substitute Care Providers (SCP) and why?
5. What part of your experience would you like to share through your participation in this group?
6. What has been the most personally challenging part of your experience as a SCP?
7. What has been one the most valuable gifts of being a SCP?

The interview followed a semi-structured format and gathered information about their experiences as tribally specified and approved SCP.

Prior to the interview each participant was asked to review the consent form and if there were any questions, comments or concerns about the consent form, the interview or the project. One consent form was to be completed in person at that time, and authorized consent of the follow up interview. Participation in this project and interviews was voluntary and confidential depending on the preference of the participants. Their identification is associated to their selected preference, affiliation or pseudonym as designated on the informed consent. Interview audio was captured with a digital recorder,

transcribed and analyzed for themes within the shared experiences of the SCP. Consent was reviewed again during the follow up interviews where participants have the opportunity to clarify and approve any use of quotations and key information shared by them during the interview.

The potential risks associated with participation in this project were anticipated to be low. Participants may have felt uncomfortable or uneasy sharing things about their personal and family life. It was clarified to participants that they could choose not to answer any questions. Participants were also given the opportunity to review any documented information for accuracy and clarification during the follow up interview prior to the summary of data being included in the final published report.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the shared experiences of placement care providers was sorted and analyzed using the inductive analysis method. Utilizing the inductive analysis method the recorded and transcribed interviews were reviewed for recurring themes related to the objective of reinforcing recruitment, retention, training and support strategies of social service agencies. The underlying purpose to the general inductive approach is as follows:

1. “to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format;
2. to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure that these links are both transparent (able

to be demonstrated to others) and defensible(justifiable given the objectives of the research); and

3. to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of the experiences or processes that are evident in the data” (Thomas, p. 238, 2006).

The transcribed interviews provided such raw and varied text data that the general inductive approach to evaluation and analysis provided a clear way to summarize and present the findings of the project. The process of coding consists of preparing the raw data, close reading of the text, creation of categories, identifying overlap in coding and uncoded text, and continuing the refinement and revision of category system, (Thomas, 2006) In keeping with the integrity of the general inductive model and framework the coded themes will be structured in a category with five key features;

1. Category label
2. Category description: description of the meaning, including key characteristics
3. Text or data associated with the category: examples of text or data coded in the category
4. Links: each category may have links or relationships with other categories.
5. The type of model in which the category is embedded: the category may or may not be embedded in a model, theory or framework.

The follow up interviews allowed for the coding accuracy to be confirmed by the participants, and falls into the assessment of trustworthiness outlined in the general inductive analysis approach, (Thomas, 2006). All data was kept in password-protected

computer, until the report was written and then the summarized recommendations and final report will be provided to a Northern California Tribal agency. Once the report was written, the data summaries were confirmed and the project is completed, all individual data sources (i.e. recordings, transcriptions, notes and any other related confidential materials) were destroyed as of June 17 2016.

Results

The purpose of the project was to utilize the richness of information embedded in the experiences of Placement Care Providers (PCP) to shape and inform effective approaches to recruitment, retention, support and training. There were 10 initial potential participants and from that pool 5 individuals were able to share their experience. The average interview was 30 minutes in length. All names shared in these results are pseudonyms chosen by participants in the informed consent process to honor the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. The vision for the shared experiences that were transcribed into raw text data was to reinforce and/or enhance the engagement of tribal agencies in the quality of care provided for Indigenous children. The categorical themes supported by the data and the objectives they linked to are as follows:

- Collaboration directly links to and supports retention
- Informed Guidance links to and supports recruitment
- Trainings link to and specify the nature of trainings PCP feel are most helpful
- Facilitation of Peer Support links to the most helpful support systems PCP identified
- Tribal Empowerment links to the objective of Tribally specific engagement
- Shared Wisdom honors the participants wisdom and created space to receive and include the wholeness of their experience

Collaboration

Collaboration, as defined in the collective context and understanding of the project participants, is the coming together for strategy, decisions and input on the best interest of the child. A collaboration of county, tribal, biological and extended family, community and placement care providers with an equal voice, team effort and approach to meeting the needs of the child in care. Collaboration is an interdependent with informed guidance and communication, which both significantly support the balance of all four quadrants of the relational framework that structures the perspective of this project. Some of the quotes supporting the theme of collaboration as a means of enhancing the experience of PCP's are as follows:

“Diamond” “When they do call you don’t feel intimidated, you feel part of the team vs. being used to provide placement.”

“Rosebud” “Often times not having the availability or the information of the biological family, in order to help the children feel successful and know that their family is loved and cherished as well as they are, and feeling like somebody has my back (in providing care and structure for the child).”

“Holly” “I always felt like you were being told what to do, never being asked how they could help you get what you needed to meet the needs of the child.”

“Holly” “Challenged in a condescending demeanor and I had to stand up for myself. While I have the ability and strength to stand up for myself because I am a professional, they shouldn't be talking to anyone like that.”

“Monique” “ So I emailed 5 people for one request and had to prompt communication between them.”

“Monique” “With our first kid we have wrap around sessions with the coach, teacher, us, his family, friends and it worked really well. Empowered the youth.”

Informed Guidance

Informed guidance as it relates to the experiences of the placement care providers who participated in my project is grounded in clear, responsive, respectful and informed communication. Some of the challenges that emerged as recurring themes were the importance and impact of communication between the social workers and the placement care providers. Informed guidance and communication are interdependent with collaboration, as are the objectives of retention and recruitment. In the structure of the relational framework informed guidance and communication would also be woven into balancing the physical, context, spiritual and mental quadrants.

“Diamond” “ The social worker said we are looking for placement and handed us this huge binder and we were just overwhelmed like “what are we getting into?”

“Noni” “ I feel like I’m always overstepping my bounds, so I’m always worried about what in the long run is going to be in the best interest of the child”

“Holly” “...I felt more overwhelmed with this little guy in my home because there were rules that I was unaware of and I was trying to abide by, but I wasn’t quite sure how it worked and who I could ask.”

“Monique” “... Because I’m verbal and ask a lot of questions I communicated a lot with the workers and when I didn’t get something, I kept asking and called a supervisor.”

Trainings

Trainings as collectively defined by the participants, referred to trainings that support parenting and supporting the children in their home with the emotional processing of the trauma. Training, information and prompted awareness to the behavioral and emotional manifestations of the trauma in children engaged with the child welfare system were echoed in every interview. It was a clear collective statement that the role, responsibility and loving care that is required and given full heartedly goes beyond day to day parenting and trainings specific to the needs of the children and the providers are needed.

“Diamond” “ Early on she was having habits that I had never dealt with and I was guessing they were from anxiety, new structure and how the visits were going. I wasn’t skilled at dealing with those things, like self- destructive behaviors.”

“Rosebud” “ There is not enough support in the in the community in the way of trainings for special needs, or a back up for kids who are violent that we need mental

health services to be on call for those moments or hours when a child is disrupting and there are other children in the home.”

“Noni” “ So how do I stop it (the cycle of substance abuse and non-parenting), so she (my granddaughter) doesn’t do the same thing?” “ How do I support the baby in not becoming them?”

“Monique” “ The point is we need training to help deal with other peoples children who have been traumatized.”

“Monique” “ When children ask why don’t parents take care of me? Why don’t they sober up? You’re counseling children.”

Facilitation of Peer Support

The rich contribution of shared experience amongst PCP was made apparent in the recurring discussion of peer support and being able to connect with other families who are or have been through providing placement for Indigenous youth. PCP who indicated having direct connections to other PCP, direct affiliation with the tribe and the experience of others considered these relationships a rich resource for guidance and support. The facilitation of peer support and connecting with the experience of others speaks directly to the 3nd quadrant in the relational worldview, mental, in these relationships PCP are able to receive the “passing of stories” and find the skills to negotiate marginalized circumstance.

“Diamond” “...Like a luncheon for the substitute care providers (SCP), sometime, you know so we could share things together about what its like, just little gatherings to get to share ideas and ask questions about things like schools for the little ones or you know just getting to know other people going through similar things.”

“Rosebud” “I have been able to go to other care providers and form other support groups and support families and people that have a connection with each other to support us, in addition to getting and sharing trainings.”

“Noni” “The best help that I’ve gotten from family members, my mother, my father, my aunts and my uncles because I hadn’t realized they had been foster parents to their own grandchildren.”

“Monique” “I want to be able to call somebody. Mentors we asked for mentors...”

“Monique” “The biggest support has been this older gal who has been a foster parent for over 25 years. She’s helped us upriver form a caregivers association, so when I or other SCP’s have questions we can call her. She knows the rules and has prepared us for court meeting with the information we needed and the advice of her experience.”

“Holly” “The biggest level of support I had was probably from the most informal sources, which was other tribal homes that had similar situations. So I often called on friends, colleagues who knew of people in similar situations and they provided me with the best information and guidance”

Tribal Empowerment

The category of Tribal Empowerment emerged as the umbrella objective for this project and as an underlying theme in the experiences of the PCP who participated. The collective meaning that emerged was embracing their voice, their knowing and their ability to exercise their own personal empowerment was reinforced by their tribal affiliations, the degree of engagement with the tribal social worker or their access to connecting with the tribal social worker. On the other side of that experience was the feeling of disconnect from “the source” culture, core and empowerment for themselves and the Indigenous children in their home. This umbrella category is linked in critical ways to “the source” of overall balance in that the engagement of the tribe offers direct connection to the cultural identity and connection for the Indigenous youth navigating placement and the trauma of child welfare. Tribal empowerment represents “the village” for the care provider and the youth.

“Diamond” “When I saw how much of a voice the tribe had in court, I started to feel like they had a lot of power and the other social workers would back off a little, I felt good. Even though they are on the side of the child, I felt like I had some backing too.”

“Diamond” “I find myself getting real reserved, which is rare for me and a lot of anxiety, so it’s nice to have the tribe involved. I feel a little more secure I could go to them if things weren’t going the way I want”

“Rosebud” “Those of us that support the Native American community don’t always have what we need to connect them to their culture.”

“Noni” “The Tribe has been the best help to me they are the ones that have been maintaining the it (the placement) for a year, it was actually the tribal court judge that gave me direction, and what avenues to take so my grandchild is taken care of.”

“Holly” “I wanted for him to be empowered. It's what I do in my professional and personal life; work to empower tribal people, young people and my community. This helps people to have a sense of worth and fosters a connection with the larger tribal community. That's what I feel was part of our job as foster parents, to provide and build empowerment, self-worth and connections. Things they can use throughout their whole life.”

Shared Wisdom

The category of shared wisdom was developed as a means of sharing a few of the gems that were so generously shared with me through my participation in this project. Holding space in the interview for participants to share what they valued, learned or the information that was important for them to share is the application of the relational worldview aim of balance to the project itself, the participants and the interviewer. It gave space to learn beyond my own knowing and to honor the value and richness in the experiences of the people nurturing the hope and tomorrow of Indigenous communities.

“Diamond” “I know she is going to be 14 and just want her mom, so the reward is just knowing I’m putting a good foundation for her, so just getting support and reassurance that’s what we are doing.”

“Rosebud” “I just think we really really really need to look at the generational stuff like family trees for every child that comes into care to create those connections and foster that knowing.”

“Noni” Shared that social service agencies could positively reinforce the experiences of SCP by improving follow through, listening to families needs and taking some guidance from the placement care providers.

“Holly” “I wanted for him to be empowered. It's what I do in my professional and personal life; work to empower tribal people, young people and my community. This helps people to have a sense of worth and fosters a connection with the larger tribal community. That's what I feel was part of our job as foster parents, to provide and build empowerment, self-worth and connections. Things they can use throughout their whole life.”

“Monique” “We are at ground zero doing the work.”

Conclusions

In conclusion the interview of tribal specified placement care providers was rich with information, which if utilized in shaping the recruitment, retention, support and trainings strategies could improve the experiences of PCP and their impact on outcomes for the youth they serve. Within their collective experiences were the recurring themes that if applied to social service agencies discourse and structured strategies could reinforce the positive outcomes for both Indigenous children and their communities. As this study was designed to address the disproportionate need for Indigenous care providers and the engagement of tribal supports, additional themes to support this objective also emerged. Placement experiences within the child welfare system have been found to influence the personal, psychosocial and traditional development of Indigenous youth. The children of Native communities are negotiating the stark statistical probabilities of generational recidivism, incarceration, suicide and substance abuse, in addition to disconnection from self, identity and culture. Tribal and social service agencies can impact the correlation between the outcomes for Indigenous youth and their communities by accessing and incorporating the experiences of tribally specified primary care providers.

Retention, recruitment, support and trainings were identified as objectives for this study as an initial area for exploration into the experiences of tribally specified PCP. The collective definitions and themes that emerged in relation to these objectives were

collaboration, informed guidance, facilitation of peer support and direct care trainings. As outlined in the results section collaboration and informed guidance were interdependent themes, because the collective definitions and expectations were reliant on respectful, clear and transparent communication. The umbrella objective of providing tribal agencies with information specific to their role in the experiences of PCP emerged as a theme of tribal empowerment. The collective experiences that framed the interaction between placement providers and the tribe manifested in a sense of representation and empowerment, the tribe was regarded as a heard voice within their experiences. As I reflected on this project and the shared experiences of the primary placement care providers including the theme of shared wisdom was imperative to the findings in this study. As outlined in the results section, the shared wisdom of the participants was a compilation of the rich gems of their experiences.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are related to recruitment, participation, variation in Tribal community interaction and the directness of questions. These limitations impede the ability to generalize the results and directly apply these specific experiences to social service strategies that positively reinforce the experiences of PCP. The misalignments of the recruitment process and project timeline were the direct cause of the recruitment and participation limitations of this study, which resulted in a 50% participation rate and little room for the withdraw of participants. The focus of this project on a particular

geographical area and tribal community did not involve comparative data, which would have included tribal communities and county agencies outside of this specific northern California region. Another limitation to this study was the directness of the questions that provided a semi- structured interview format. Although the project questions left space for the PCP participants to share their experiences, the inclusion of questions directly addressing recruitment, retention, training and support could have created more of an emphasis on the project objectives. Even with the limitations identified and discussed the information embedded in the experiences of tribally specified PCP is a rich resource for social service agencies to incorporate in improving the outcomes for the Indigenous children they serve.

Moving Forward

Utilizing this project for the purpose of further data collection and application to additional objectives is possible because of the multipurpose capacity of the project design, relational worldview framework and the method of data analysis. However, adjustments to the specific questions and recruitment process could improve future outcomes of data collection activities using the structure from this project. The semi-structured design of the interview process allows for the experiences of participants to create the data, which supports the variability or reproduction as deemed by the researcher or desired interest. The emphasis on balancing the four quadrants of the relational worldview framework contributed to the comprehensive inclusion of the

participants and their experiences. The data created from the coded interviews and themes directly correlated to the objectives of the project, which were structured in alignment with the inductive analysis of the text data. This framework for data analysis was reliant on identifying the links between the themes, objectives and theoretical framework utilized in this project design.

Improvements for future data collection could be addressed in adjustments to the recruitment process and the questions used in the semi-structured interviews. The misalignment of the recruitment and project timelines discussed in the limitations of this study, resulted in an initial pool of 10 potential participants. Initiating the discussion, identification and recruitment process for participants with at least 2-3 months prior to project deadlines could have resulted in a larger pool of participants. The larger pool of participants could contribute to a wider range of diversity within the participants and broader scope of application for the project results. The questions used in this interview were designed to capture the experiences of engagement with social service agencies for the purpose of reinforcing the positive experiences of PCP. However during the course of this project the questions, their intended topic and perceived topic were inconsistently clear to the participants. Creating a more considerate and concise set of questions to structure the interview could increase the engagement, data and understanding of the participants. The suggested adjustments are based on the first hand experience and learning of the primary facilitator of this project and study.

Recommendations

Retention

Collaboration and informed guidance are interdependent recommendations for retention. This recommendation is intended to shape and reinforce the relationship between tribal representation, support and the bureaucratic navigation of caring for Indigenous children within the child welfare system and is as follows:

Between the 7th and 30th day of a child's placement: there could be a coming together of placement provider, county social worker, tribal social worker, biological parents and any other relevant persons. The objective of this meeting will be to introduce all invested parties, create an exchange of clear and accurate information with a consistent definitions, context and understanding of how to support the child, family and community.

This recommendation supports the collaboration of interested persons from county and tribal agencies, immediate and extended family, community partners and placement care providers with a voice, team effort and approach to meeting the needs of the Indigenous child in care.

Support

Facilitation of peer support is the recommendation for supporting placement care providers and the Indigenous children in their care. This recommendation is for tribal

social service staff to facilitate a space and opportunity for placement care providers to meet, interact and connect with each other and is as follows:

Twice a week for 1 to 1 ½, the tribal agency hosts and staffs an open informal space with light refreshments for placement care providers of Indigenous children. The recommendation of twice a week can allow for two different times of day, two different locations and increase maximize the opportunity for participation. The open informal format of this space will allow for the PCP's to set the tone and environment for engagement. The inclusion of light refreshments (i.e. coffee, tea, fruit or cookies), can promote a social and welcoming environment for PCP to exchange information, experiences and support.

This recommendation facilitates peer support, in addition to connections amongst PCP, supportive affiliation with tribal services and the exchange of experience, which were identified as a rich resource for guidance and support.

Trainings

Trainings focused on the development of skills and techniques to negotiate trauma informed parenting is the recommendation for effective training of PCP. This recommendation is a response to the expressed need of the project participants for supporting the Indigenous children, faced with the emotional repercussions of historical, family and child welfare trauma, in their care. This recommendation is as follows:

Twice a month a “PCP Workshop” would be hosted by the affiliated tribal agency. These workshops would be comprised of community resource presentations, topic specific community professional presentations and special event speakers when possible. The intention of this recommendation is to provide placement and topic specific information and guidance to PCP. This recommendation would require connecting with local agencies and professionals for availability and willingness to volunteer. The twice a month offering would create more opportunity for participation if arranged in two separate locations and/or two separate times of day.

This recommendation responds to the collective and consistently expressed need for training, information and prompted awareness to the behavioral and emotional manifestations of the trauma in children engaged with the child welfare system.

Recruitment

The implementation of the preceding recommendations is the recommendation for recruitment. Reinforcing the experience and retention of current placement care providers could increase the informal identification and recruitment of potential placement care providers. The recommendation for recruitment is as follows:

Through consistent collaboration and the inclusion of PCP in the exchange of information, interaction and the effectiveness of a team approach would ensure that perspective PCP would be treated with regard, respect and foster a positive working relationship. The clear and direct communication of informed guidance is also an

interdependent contributing factor to the positive experiences of PCP, which would support the informal identification and recruitment of perspective PCP. The facilitation of peer support as recommended would create a social space for perspective PCP to interact and engage with current PCP. The implementation of “PCP workshops” creates the opportunity for perspective PCP to initiate training and awareness of the skills and techniques to support providing placement care.

The above-mentioned recommendations identify potential areas where the affiliated tribal agency could increase engagement and tribal empowerment for the individuals providing care for Indigenous children and supporting the revitalization of Indigenous communities.

Reflection

Reflecting on my personal process through the implementation of this project has been rich with the expansion of my perspective, awareness and way of being with the participants. Initially I was unconsciously relying on my western experience and perspective to shape, implement and engage with my project, through the structure and analysis process. However with the tribal and indigenous emphasis of this project the more I researched previous and relevant research the more I saw that it was my job to hold an open space for the shared experiences. The identification of participants as substitute care providers was used in the project design, however through the course of conducting the interviews and hearing the dedication and love of these providers it felt wrong. With this increasing awareness of how ill fit this identification was I found myself

apologizing and uncomfortable with the identification, so I started using placement care provider in its place. As the shared experiences of the participants impacted the way I thought about the work they do I was able to find comfort in the humility of a life long learner and the honor in the gift they gave me in their stories.

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