

**American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) UsCC
Community Symposiums Project
FY 18-19 CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Community Symposium Project (Mental Wellness Gathering Series) was developed to engage, empower, and enlist the American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) community into conversations about mental health and traditional forms of healing. Through dialogue and experiential engagement, all community members would be given opportunities to learn more about the unique mental health needs of the AI/AN community and understand how these traditional forms of healing are practiced by the AI/AN community. As a result, mental health services/resources would be promoted which would help in reducing stigma and increase the capacity of the public mental health system in the Los Angeles County area. Additionally, the on-going series would pose multiple opportunities to inform the AI/AN community regarding the American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC) subcommittee in order to increase community member and consumer interest and participation in the MHSa stakeholder process and engage more consumers and community members to participate in the planning and development of future American Indian/Alaska Native Mental Health Conferences.

A Focus Group was conducted on July 3, 2019 during a UsCC meeting which consisted of various community members and Native organization leadership providers. During this focus group, it was determined that the top five topics of need for the AI/AN community symposium consisted of; traditional ways of healing, indigenizing education, art and music as medicine, suicide prevention/harm reduction, and historical trauma to intergenerational resilience. Each topic was then organized to hold a specific kind of event in a different Service Planning Area (SPA) location in Los Angeles County. Once each SPA was determined, a notice through an email listserv and social media posts were sent out requesting that speakers/facilitators register to apply. This was intentional as it gave AI/AN and all community members equal opportunities to share knowledge on such unique topics that require a certain specialty in knowledge, practices, and experiences.

Each event commenced with land acknowledgment and a prayer/blessing from a tribal member of the lands we were hosting our event. Land acknowledgment is not just a formal way to



recognize the land we reside on, but is also a way to honor indigenous protocol of respecting the land that we stand on which has allowed us to hold space together. Land Acknowledgement is also a way to bring visibility to the indigenous people of the land, as well as provide safe space for Native people attending these events. Moreover, each event ended with post-surveys, a giveaway, and food so that participants could have opportunities to network and build relationships with other participating members from the community.

Throughout the entirety of the Community Symposium Project, the UsCC committee liaisons provided feedback, suggestions for improvement, clarification needed on deliverables, and were given opportunities during each event to share information to the community about UsCC's planning and development. Moreover, changes were made to the project's certain plans and specific items based on suggested feedback from UsCC members.

Project Results/Outcomes:

There were a total of 339 participants to attended The Community Symposium Project (Mental Wellness Gathering Series) over the course of the 5 different workshops. The workshop attendees were as follows: 61 attended "Traditional Ways of Healing", 52 attended "Indigenize Education", 106 attended "Art & Music as Medicine", 69 attended "Suicide Prevention and Harm Reduction", and 51 attended "Historical Trauma to Intergenerational Resilience". Of the total 339 participants, 159 identified as American Indian/Alaska Native. We imagine this number to be greater if the question about identity was more inclusive, including community members who are descendants and might not have tribal enrollment status. Oftentimes, this becomes a challenging question for community members, especially in an urban setting because community members might have minimal knowledge or ties to their homelands, therefore unsure what is the "correct" way to identify. Additionally, if the question was inclusive of other Indigenous Nations throughout this continent, we imagine more folks to identify as Native. In future data collections, we plan to provide more inclusive options.

A total of 200 pre-post surveys were collected and reported using a likert scale, 1 being "none" to 5 being "a lot" for the 5 questions below:

1. **How much knowledge do you have of the American Indian/Alaska Native community in Los Angeles County?**

None 1 2 3 4 5 a lot

2. **How much knowledge do you have about mental health challenges with American Indian/Alaska Native?**

None 1 2 3 4 5 a lot

3. **How much knowledge do you have with traditional forms of healing?**



None 1 2 3 4 5 a lot

4. How aware are you of services available in Los Angeles County for American Indian/Alaska Native?

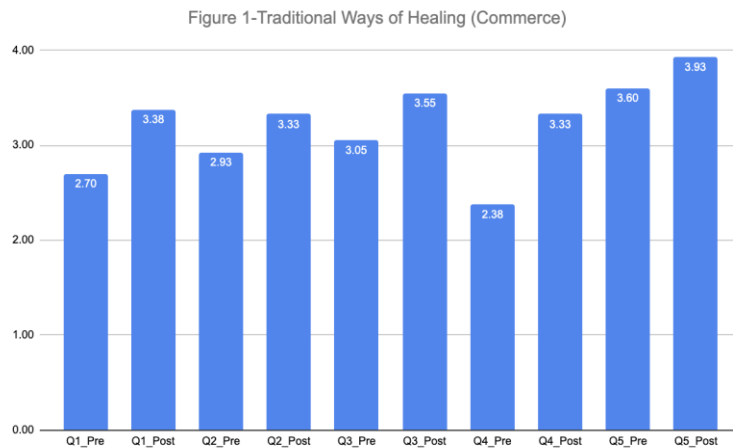
None 1 2 3 4 5 a lot

5. How comfortable are you with accessing mental health services in Los Angeles County?

None 1 2 3 4 5 a lot

39 people completed the survey for “Traditional Ways of Healing” which took place on Saturday, September 28, 2019 from 9am-1pm located in SPA 7’s City of Commerce located in the South East side of Los Angeles. After prayer and land acknowledgment, we had an all Native panel, facilitated by Monique Castro, pose questions around access to mental wellness in the urban setting. The final workshop was facilitated by Chad Pfeiffer, LPCC (Diné) who presented on how to implement traditional ways of healing in an urban setting like that of Los Angeles.

The data for the pre-post surveys in Figure 1 below are consistent with The Community Symposium Project (Mental Wellness Gathering Series) objectives and demonstrates an increase in knowledge and comfort when trying to access mental health services for AI/AN families.



33 people completed the survey for “Indigenize Education” which took place on Saturday, October 10, 2019 from 9am-1pm located in SPA 3’s City of Alhambra in the San Gabriel Valley. We hosted a 5-person panel in which panelists were able to touch upon how education can impact student wellness. After the panel, participants were able to choose from three different breakout sessions:

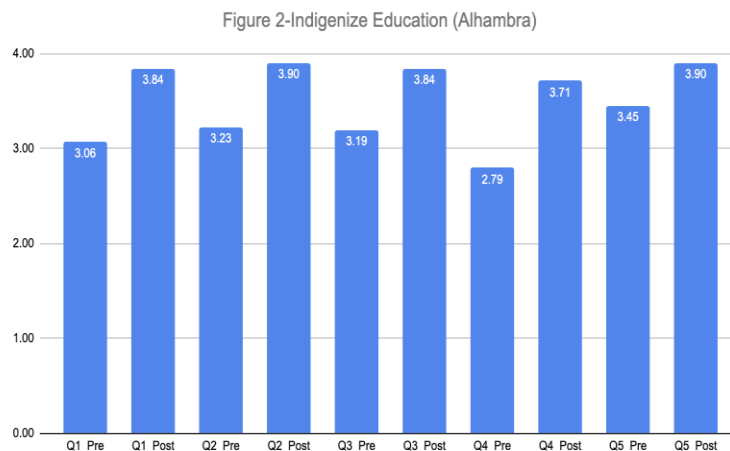


Session 1-“Addressing the Overrepresentation of Indigenous Students in Special Education” Facilitated by Gladys Aparicio, the workshop addressed the racial and ethnic disparities in the identification, placement, and discipline of children with disabilities, along with the experience of children of color with disabilities in a segregated education system. Topics also included the relationship between trauma and educational experiences of students and families in special education, and the tools needed in order to resist unfair treatment in schools.

Session 2-“Transition to Higher Education: Identity, Intersectionality, and Involvement” Facilitated by Elena Nourrie, the workshop entailed that “With each of our multiple identities we carry values that guide our actions and interactions”. This workshop explored how we support our students' understandings of identity, values, and voice particularly as we prepare them for life after high school. Participants engaged in activities and discussion centered on three key elements: identity, intersectionality and involvement. These key elements are central to ensure our next generation of leaders has a strong ability to advocate, vocalize collective strengths/needs, and build community to see the change we know we need.

Session 3-“Using an Indigenous Lens to Change the Curriculum” Facilitated by Melissa Alcala, this workshop addressed how educators, parents, and community members could explore how to use an indigenous perspective to reshape the Western “traditional” ways of learning in a classroom setting. Areas that were covered included expanding on new ways to do lesson planning, discovering different instructional strategies, and understanding of what it means to have a culturally inclusive classroom.

The data for the pre-post surveys in Figure 2 below are consistent with The Community Symposium Project (Mental Wellness Gathering Series) objectives and demonstrates an increase in knowledge and comfort when trying to access mental health services for AI/AN families.



62 people completed the survey for “Art and Music as Medicine” which took place on Saturday, November 11, 2019 from 4pm-8pm located in SPA 4’s City of Los Angeles located in



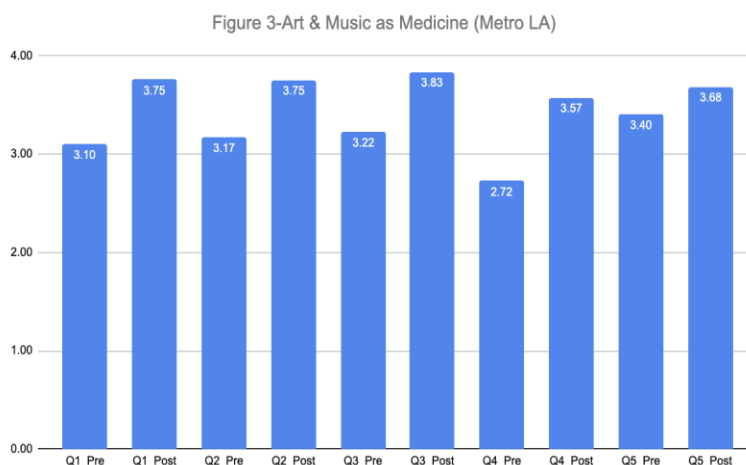
the Boyle Heights area. We hosted a 5 panel discussion of different Native American artists who shared how art and music can serve as medicine, followed by three different workshop sessions:

Workshop A was an Acrylic Canvas Painting Workshop facilitated by *Deonoveigh Mitchell (Diné/African American)*. All participants received their own canvas along with step-by-step directions to guide them through the painting experience. Participants were asked to be open and trusting of the experience; that art is a form of self-expression and therefore, there is no such thing as "messing up". The goal of this workshop was for participants to not only create their own heartwork, but to apply their own unique touches to their art that represent a beautiful/cherished memory.

Workshop B, "Beading as Medicine" was facilitated by *Kimberly Robertson (Mvskoke) & Jenell Navarro (Cherokee)* who use beading, an Indigenous method, to activate our people's well-being and help us heal from historical and ongoing injustices. Each participant was gifted with a bead kit and pattern that participants beaded collectively to act out Indigenous knowledge, connect to ancestors, and establish visibility for Indigenous community-oriented determination.

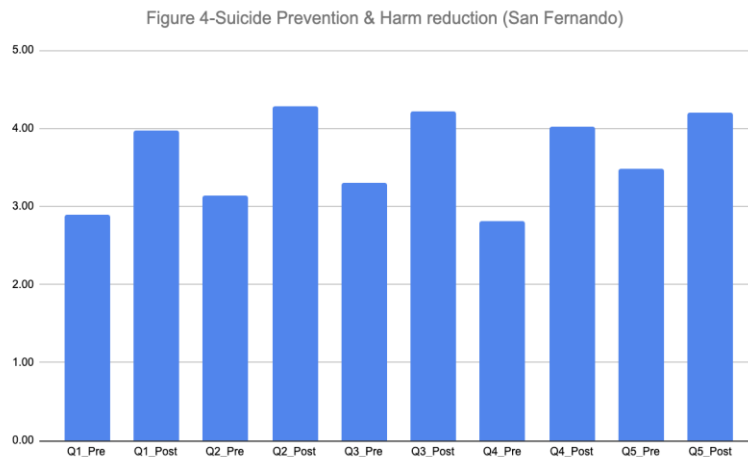
Workshop C, "Spray Painting," Facilitated by *Ernesto Yerena (Yaqui/Chicano)* prepared stencils that included words and images relating to mental wellness. During this workshop participants self-selected the stencils and spray paint colors that most resonated with them, creating an art piece or pieces to take home. Ernesto also provided support to participants throughout the workshop including sharing various spray painting techniques (how to layer images & colors).

The data for the pre-post surveys in Figure 3 below are consistent with The Community Symposium Project (Mental Wellness Gathering Series) objectives and demonstrates an increase in knowledge and comfort when trying to access mental health services for AI/AN families.



36 people completed the survey for **“Suicide Prevention and Harm Reduction”** which took place on Saturday, January 11, 2020 from 11am-2pm located in SPA 4’s San Fernando Valley area. This event discussed how to best support one another to help prevent suicide and self-harm. The event included a testimony by Charlene and Fred Avilla, parents of Rosalie Avila, who shared their personal story and how it has led them to initiate anti-bullying laws in schools in order to prevent suicide. This was followed by a “Ribbon Ceremony” conducted by Carlos Lamidrid, LCSW (Yaqui/Chiricahua Apache/Mexica). A Ribbon Ceremony is a traditional way to use a talking circle to honor those who have been lost by suicide and for loved ones to find ways to heal.

The data for the pre-post surveys in Figure 4 below are consistent with The Community Symposium Project (Mental Wellness Gathering Series) objectives and demonstrates an increase in knowledge and comfort when trying to access mental health services for AI/AN families.

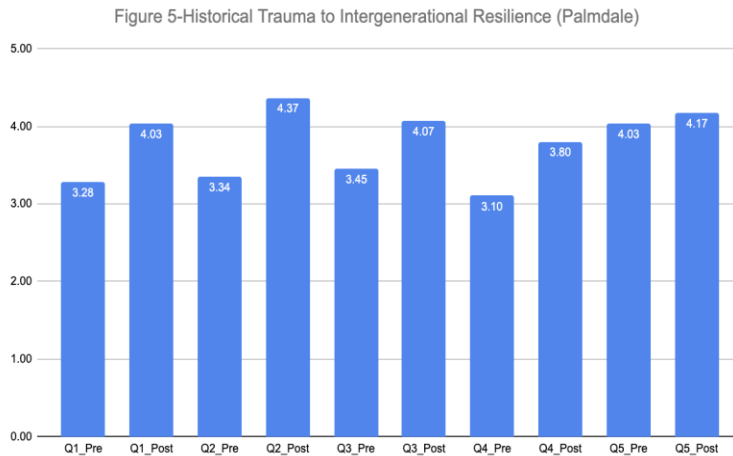


30 people completed the survey for **“Historical Trauma to Intergenerational Resilience”** which took place on Saturday, February 8, 2020 from 11am-2pm located in SPA 1’s City of Palmdale located in the Antelope Valley area. This workshop addressed how to best support one another to help heal from historical trauma, as well as celebrate the resilience we have built from our ancestors. The event included Kylee Jones, a licensed social worker, in leading participants in an informative visual presentation about historical trauma and how it has led to intergenerational resilience for AI/AN communities. Kylee engaged participants by using an interactive activity that got community members active and alert through sparking dialogue. This was followed by an experiential exercise facilitated by Olivia Biera. Olivia discussed the patterns of trauma and how to untangle these patterns. Olivia also shared ways on how to practice self-healing from intergenerational trauma and demonstrate protocols for ending the painful cycle.

The data for the pre-post surveys in Figure 5 below are consistent with The Community Symposium Project (Mental Wellness Gathering Series) objectives and demonstrates an



increase in knowledge and comfort when trying to access mental health services for AI/AN families.



Participant Comments/Quotes:

Traditional Ways of Healing symposiums did not have a section on the pre/post survey to provide comments. To allow for more feedback from community members, we added a comment section after this event.

Indigenize Education Feedback

“Enjoyed Melissa's enthusiasm!”

“I learned alot today about indigenizing education and what I can do in my own classroom teaching high school English to students most of whom are Indigenous to North and South America (Turtle Island)”

“Very thoughtful- Eye opening good day to be Indian”

“More events in the San Gabriel Valley! We need more in this area”

“I appreciate the diff. perspectives of folks on the panel. Especially their personal stories. I enjoyed the workshop on creating curriculum. As an educator at an afterschool program I have never run into any event like this or guidance on how to implement Indigenous ways of learning into the classroom/education setting.”

“Very informative and provided confidence to research my ancestors stories. (lives) Learn about my family and be proud of who I am!”

“I heard useful reinforcement of the need to empower students to speak from their perspectives, and got alot of resources to take with me into curriculum design in higher education”

“WOW- great knowledge, the network & resources that I received are so valuable to improve my instruction to Black and brown students. As well as healing through extracurricular activities-nature healing. KEEP DOING THIS GREAT WORK.”

“Resources for teachers to incorporate in the class. The workshop was very informative.”



“Good topic with some great input as to why it’s so important. Indigeneity/culture are recognized + part of the educational efforts in school + colleges. Also good sharing of ‘stories’, solutions + resources. Hopefully these efforts will increase + improve the wellness of Indigenous culture + impact our society as a whole + change the way dominant culture see others + various Indigenous culture- esp. Native Americans”

“Thank you!”

“Great workshop! LOVED ALL THE INFO! More workshops please!!!”

“We need more of these workshops, thank you! This was a very powerful + informative event in general! The speakers were amazing + insightful.”

Art & Music as Medicine Feedback

“Thank you for all you do! A.HO.”

“Wish to hear more traditional forms of healing other than just music & art”

“As for me, I was very blessed by everyone, I pray that creator blesses you all. Keep these wellness get together, as my heart is warm by love”

“This event was beautifully put together. As someone new to the community I felt very welcomed.”

“Thank you!”

“AHO! Thank you so much.”

“Very glad I came! I loved all activities + was happy to talk about how to heal. It was very meaningful to me to be able to hear other mixed Natives talk about their past + what it was like growing up. I felt like they understood, + would love to keep working on that with others.”

“Good. We need another art workshop next time.”

“Great event. The kids loved it! Thanks!”

“This event was wonderful. Thank you!”

“My first of many beading to come :)”

“Thanks for having us”

“Great beading workshop! Would definitely recommend this activity and take workshop again!”

“Really enjoyed this conference.”

“Love this event :)”

“Amazing!! :)”

“Very fun!”

“The environment was very welcoming.”

“Loved all the options for exploring different forms of healing through art rather than traditional medicine.”

“Good workshop! Enjoyed it very much!”

“Great, relaxing, excellent info and diverse representation!”

“This was an incredible event where I learned alot.”

“I really enjoyed the panel session! Overall, I think this event was very well put together.”

“This wellness gathering was so much fun and informative. Alot of togetherness and community.”

“I loved it! Thank you! Would like to attend more of these gatherings in the future.”

“Good work! Thank you.”



“More of this wellness helps to understand more of my craft.”

“Great event.”

Suicide Prevention/Harm Reduction Feedback

“This workshop was powerful, more of this! Thank you.”

“Having traditional forms of healing like storytelling, sharing narratives was really helpful in building cultural competence in social work. Spaces and workshops like this are necessary for Indigenous peoples.”

“This event was so powerful. Hope to see more in other areas.”

“This was a much needed community event. Very empowering and healing. Many similar events are needed here in Northern San Fernando Valley.”

“Hope we can hold more events similar in nature in the future.”

“My family and I have been looking for help like this for years. We have had several suicides recently that something like this even could have helped them still be here. We need more funding to have more events like this. Great community driven outreach/intervention. Can't wait to bring my family to it.”

“This gathering was absolutely awesome! THANK YOU for providing such needed outreach and healing. As a learner, I would only request additional literature regarding the content of the above questions and perhaps instructions/options for how we can offer service and assistance for any needs within and or behalf of the community.”

“Ceremony was the most potent and effective ‘educational’ experience I’ve ever had the privilege to partake in. THANK YOU.”

“I am thankful to have been a part of this gathering. I am forever grateful & am looking forward to more gatherings & growth.”

“Thank you Monique + staff + volunteers. This is the most POWERFUL circle I’ve ever been to in the 5 years I’ve been going to different circles. OMETEO.”

“Awesome workshop!”

“Great training. I wish more trainings were like this.”

“Thank you so much for this space. No lecture but I learned alot.”

“This event was very moving + needed. I thank the organizers + the people who shared their stories so that the community can learn and improve this world. I am grateful that this was done in a way that is best for Native + Indigenous communities.”

“Great workshop!”

“Keep doing educational workshops, thank you! Tlazo.”

“The gathering committee did an exceptional job with the event. The information given was important and pertinent to our community.”

“Great experience to share. Felt connected to the group.”

“I loved it. I would allow more time for all of us to share. Thank you. “

“This space was great and I would like to know how I can get this started in my community.”

“Thank you for a great event.”

“Thank you for this space, we need more. Thank you for the work that you do and I am open to helping + supporting in any way.”

“Thank you for everything.”



“Excellent opportunity for the community to gather, become aware of and discuss the delicate painful subject of suicide, pain and trauma in our families & within our community. The opening of hearts opens the opportunity for the path to reveal itself of how we heal, recover, create solutions, and move forward.”

Historical Trauma to Intergenerational Resilience Feedback

“Great presenter!”

“As I learn more, I get it more and more. Thank you.”

“Thank you. All mental health resources are appreciated.”

“Great presentation. Would like the series to continue to the next level.”

“It was amazing! Being reminded how connected we are between various groups reminds me why I entered my field for mental health.”

“I really wish I could have attended more of the series. This is great space to learn, connect and begin change”

“Dance, light, and sound. Thank you!”

“Thankful to share space with everyone present. Also wonderful speakers.”

“Awesome!”

Lessons Learned

Data analysis of surveys and event debriefs after each event is how we were able to make the following events even better. The following list outlined below is what we learned through this process:

- There needs to be a stronger push in advance when outreaching to other AI/AN organizations for their information on services/resources. Additionally, having other AI/AN organizations table events would have provided more access to these resources and provide answers to questions in the moment. This was evident when different AI/AN organizations tabled the event in the San Fernando Valley.
- Locations of events must be accessible for elders and those with different abilities. This includes but is not limited to size in space, wheelchair ramps, chairs with high back support, appropriate lighting, etc. We learned this after the event in Alhambra in which we assigned volunteers to help support specific community members who requested it.
- Daycare and/or child-friendly activities are highly recommended in order to allow adult participants to fully engage. By the second event, we provided “coloring page kits” in which children had opportunities to color culturally relevant coloring pages of famous AI/AN people who made positive changes in the community.

Recommendations

Overall, The Community Symposium Project (Mental Wellness Gathering Series) was successful in reaching its goal to engage, empower, and enlist the AI/AN community into conversations about mental health and traditional forms of healing. These events created safe spaces for not



just AI/AN community members, but also for allies and wellness service providers who support AI/AN families. Through qualitative and quantitative data, the following recommendations are outlined below:

- There is a need to have more community organizing and events that initiate dialogue and experiential engagement for the AI/AN community using similar topics and implementation models.
- There is a high interest of learning and understanding of cultural competency from Non-Native service providers who serve AI/AN families, therefore staff trainings and workshops are encouraged to be created for future programming.
- SPA 4's San Fernando Valley's survey comments and conversations with participating members indicate a need for more partnerships between SPA 4 and other service areas in the Los Angeles area.
- There is a great need for more multigenerational programming that adheres to the entire family unit, which requires more funding to support such initiatives for future projects (daycare, etc.).
- The data does not indicate why people did not attend events who made reservations to the events, therefore further information and research is needed to better understand why AI/AN families are interested in such events but did not attend such events.
- Although we provided folders with hardcopies of resources for each event, there needs to be one central location, preferably online, so that AI/AN community members have easier access to resources, therefore a digital toolkit of mental health services specifically for AI/AN that are culturally appropriate is recommended for future initiatives.

