Compassionate approaches for supporting wellbeing in Native American transition age young people

Jules Villanueva-Castaño, BA
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Jules Villanueva-Castaño (he, him, his, any)

- Spent first 5 years living in Sierra Nevada mountains.
- Raised in Santa Cruz, CA.
- Chicano/Yaqui/English/German.
- Parents activists, poets, Chicano/Yaqui.
- Activism, culture and working in community part of family history.
- Nature is very important to me. Connection to Creator, source, mana, energy.
- Passionate about the creation of youth-friendly pathways that build resiliency and honor youth voice.
Learning Objectives

At the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- Learn about **youth-centered approaches** as opportunities to build relationships and trust when supporting Native American transitional age youth.
- Discuss approaches for **youth advocacy** that center youth voice and honor their **autonomy** and agency as young adults.
- Know more about **building life skills** alongside transition age youth as a **trusted adult ally**
Youth-centered approaches

- Defining Transitional Age Youth (TAY)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Age 10-18</th>
<th>Age 18-25</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limbic system (drives emotions) intensifies during puberty along with hormones</td>
<td>Prefrontal cortex (controls impulses) further develops and matures in early 20s</td>
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<td>Rapid cognitive, emotional, social and rational growth from childhood to adulthood</td>
<td>Greater control over impulsive actions</td>
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<td>Greater risk-taking behaviours</td>
<td>Less risk-taking behaviours, more sound judgement</td>
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Defining TAY Youth

- Age range
- Synonymous to early adulthood
- Early 20’s, super transitionary
- Moving into adulthood
- Looking for work, finding meaning in school
- Different as a native, institutions are less-friendly/welcoming
- Often young natives feel isolated or unsure of who to share their truth with in non-native spaces
- Always in motion, time of uncertainty
Question for the audience

• In your experience working with TAY youth, what are the most common mental health or wellness challenges they face?

• What factors contribute to these challenges?
Youth-centered approaches

- Coming from a “native lens”
- Holding generational perspectives during societal change
Native lens

- Personal approaches and cultural background informs my work,
- Critical to know and acknowledge historical trauma and be open to generational considerations.
- Be mindful speaking from personal experience. Read the room!
- Relating to the personal experiences of folks who are native and non-native.
- Honoring family and relations. Ask!
- **Listening** and talking story
- Urban native youth, vs. rural native youth, common ground can be tradition, family values.
Holding generational perspective during societal change

- Young people from native backgrounds are less certain of what is next.
- Institutions are changing and power structures are less predictable and consistent (e.g. of how SATS were used in the past and now, and there being a barrier for native youth to even think about college.)
- Native young people face huge silent opposition from the dominant power structure, like the abduction and killing of native women that goes without real justice.
- Historical perspectives in native culture are different then the dominant culture, it's important to set foundation of understanding.
Youth-centered support

- Prioritize relationship
- Ask about personal goals, “their journey”
- Value youth intrinsic/cultural wisdom
Prioritize relationship

- System supports are time limited.
- **TAY youth often expect not to be heard**, being heard feels refreshing even if you don’t have a solution.
- Emphasize rapport building to support the young person to have the autonomy to say what they need.
- If you don’t have a solution, be mindful not to offer advice from a place of “empathic distress” in wanting to provide answers when you have none.
- Offer a listening ear but being clear that you don’t have solutions at this time.
Ask about personal goals & “their journey”

- Education/employment/wellbeing practices.
- Approach from your knowledge of native TAY lens.
- Support from a needs based perspective that centers the young person's thoughts on what would be effective. Resist urge to be nosy! ;)
- Be holistic, but don’t say “holistic.” :) 
- Follow their lead and then ask them if it’s ok to offer ideas.
- Be creative and taken reasonable chances.
- Help them connect to new resources and make new connections.
- You have power they don’t, use it where it makes sense.
Value youth intrinsic/cultural wisdom

- While centering all forms of safety for all involved, as an adult ally.
- Elevate their stories, goals, concerns and feelings.
- Ask brave and respectful questions and be transparent behind your intentions.
- Keep it real!
“Takeaway slide”

• Important to acknowledge power dynamics
• Advocate as an adult ally
• Be there for them when they need you
Takeaways

**Youth advocacy** that centers youth voice and honors their autonomy and agency.

a. Important to **acknowledge power dynamics**
   i. Between case managers, and other roles
   ii. Young people and adults
   iii. Cultural/racial/gender/identity/and…

b. **Advocate as an adult ally**
   i. Define a “Adult ally:”
      1. Is supportive with a TAY lens
      2. Voluntary and responsive
      3. Stay in your lane
      4. Be transparent
      5. Check your bias
      6. Have boundaries
      7. Centers all forms of safety
   ii. Listen for opportunities to help and ask first before helping
      1. Sometimes youth (or you) are overwhelmed or have other reasons for not taking action
      2. Wear your compassion goggles
   iii. Rule of 3: offer help 3 times and leave it open for them to come back
      1. Plant the seed.
      2. Be clear, consistent, warm and responsive!
Takeaways

c. Ally with them through their transition moments: be there for them when they need you
   i. TAY experience is almost constantly in transition
      1. Job
      2. Relationships
      3. School (all levels)
      4. Wellbeing (mental health, physical, spiritual, cultural…)
      5. Parent relationships
      6. Friend relationship
      7. Geographical changes
      8. Political/economic/world
      9. Building a life!
      10. ????
   ii. Ask interested questions around their next steps but don’t pry if they are “flat” or “prickly”
      1. Let them know why you are asking and avoid relating to your own experience
   iii. Connect them to peer resources (programs, warmlines, resources, support groups, trainings, etc)
Questions for the audience

● When you work with young people, are there specific approaches you use to help the young person feel like they can trust you?

● Are their resources in your community that you think are good at supporting TAY young people?

● In your role, how do you think using practices that elevate “young people’s intrinsic wisdom” could be helpful in supporting TAY youth?

● What kind of youth advocacy do you find yourself doing in your role?
References

• Prochaska’s and DiClemente’s (2005) ‘CYCLE OF CHANGE’ MODEL
• https://www.sparktheirfuture.qld.edu.au/understanding-the-teenage-brain/
Presenter Contact Information

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