

Historical Trauma and Traditional Healing Practices

Elsie Boudreau, Yup'ik
Meda Dewitt, Tlingit Traditional Healer



Achieve

- ▶ Understanding of our story and our concept of wellness
- ▶ Creating advocates and allies
- ▶ Elevating traditional health practices to a level that recognizes the value and power for healing

Apugen:

I come from a long line of proud Yup'ik people who inhabited the southwestern part of Alaska for thousands of years living off the land and according to Yuuyaraq—the Way of the Human Being—what it means to be a good relative.



Meda: Tsa Tsée Naakw, Khaat klaat, and adopted Cree name is Boss Eagle Spirit Woman

Her clan is Naanyaa.aayí, she is a child of the Kaach.aadi, and her family comes from Shtuxéenk waan, Oregon, Washington, and the Yukon Territories.



Alaska Native People

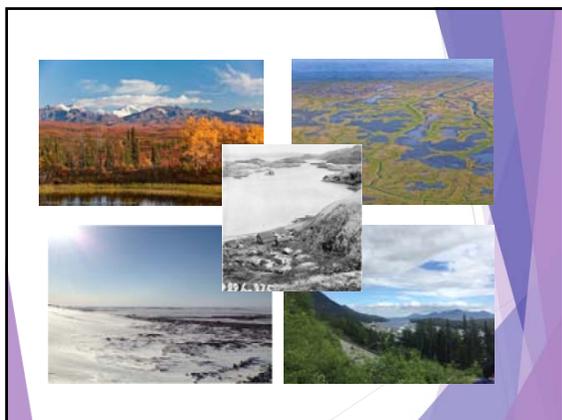


Over 220 communities

- * Alaska has 229 tribes out of the 566 BIA registered tribes in the United States of Alaska.
- * American Indian and Alaska Native population
 - Population in Alaska 14.7% (105,000 +/-)
 - Population in America 1.2% (2.9 million)
 - AI/AN alone or mixed in the US: (5.2 million)
 - Alaska has the highest AI/AN %population.

Alaska has the highest Alaska Native and American Indian % in the United States.





Language

- * Is tied to the land.
- * Harmonic representation of the relationship between the people and the ecosystem.
- * Traditional knowledge, history, and science is woven into language.
- * Inupiaq has 60 different words for "snow."
- * English is a trade language - tied to barter and commerce.
- * Traditional languages are needed to heal.



Culture

- * Culture is an expression of worldview that has been developed by a group. Cultures formation is both intentional and unintentional.
- * Intentional aspects are developed through what is chosen to be handed down. Unintentional aspects are defined by environment, events, and influences from other cultures.
- * Culture is then handed down through generations, imbuing inheritors with a collective wisdom that can be added to and creating a cultural identity that transcends the limitations of time and physicality.



Relationship

- ▶ Our traditional spiritual practices were all based on how to be in RELATIONSHIP. With optimum relationships being in balance or harmony.
- ▶ Cultivating a balanced harmonious relationship provided "good luck."



Spiritual growth



- The combination of cultural beliefs and developed worldview guide the foundations of spirituality.
- Traditionally Alaska Native people believed that: All things have spirit.
- All spirit deserved respect. All things are connected through the spiritual realm.
- Through being in service to others and stewardship to the land, spirituality will grow.

Respect was paramount.
Children were considered a
“source of wealth”.





Wise Words of the Yup’ik People:
We Talk to You Because We Love
You,
by Ann Fienup-Riordan in
partnership with the Calista
Elders Council

Compassion and respect lay the foundation.

“They say *kingumta yua* was something parents should fear harming.”



How did we get here?

Definition of Historical Trauma

Historical trauma is “cumulative and collective psychological and emotional injury sustained over a lifetime and across generations resulting from massive group trauma experiences.”

Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart, 1990

The four deaths

- * Diseases- Influenza, Smallpox, TB, and VD's. (Yuyaraq- The Way of the Human Being)
- * Alcoholism and Substance Abuse- Forced onto people, given freely, then taught how to make.
- * Enslavement and Boarding Schools- “Kill the Indian to save the man.” Carlisle Indian School
- * Disconnection from the land, water, each other and SELF: Violence, Suicide, Child Maltreatment (all forms) and all other social ills.

1900's

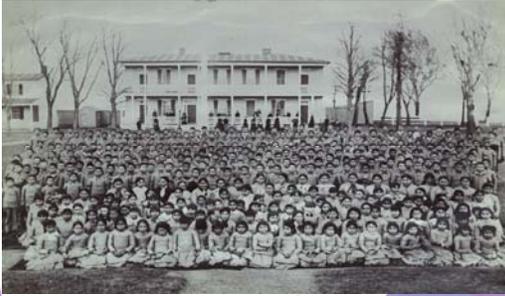
► “As a child I heard references to yuut tuqurpallratni—” when a great many died,” or The Great Death...I learned that it was a time-mark for our Yup'ik people and that it was caused by disease.”

► “...I am now convinced that the Great Death referred to the 1900 influenza epidemic which originated in Nome. 'From there it spread like a wildfire to all corners of Alaska, killing up to 60 percent of the Eskimo and Athabascan people'

(1)...This epidemic killed whole families and wiped out whole villages. It gave birth to a generation of orphans—our current grandparents and great-grandparents.”

(1) Robert Fortunine

Boarding School Era



“She has a Yup’ik name?”





First Light



why we can't
"just get
over it"

Stress and Epi-Genetics
Stress is a response to act, either good or bad. Planning a birthday party or getting into a car accident both illicit stress responses. Trauma occurs when you are not able to mitigate or cope with the stressor.

Prolonged exposure to stress changes the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of a person. With enough intensity or duration of the stressor can even change how genes express - epigenetics.

These epigenetic changes are then handed down to offspring and can continue in the lineage. This can be thought about as "Ghosts"- haunting someone, not sure why they're there, and affecting things in known and unknown ways.

Shame and guilt

Guilt: I did something wrong!

Shame: There is something wrong with me!



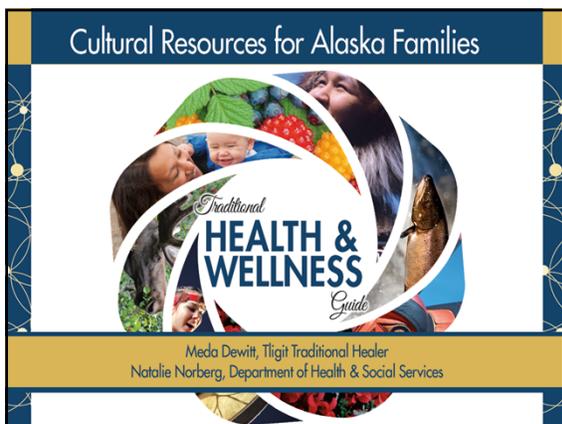
No Wonder



There is
HOPE



Connectedness Mechanisms				
Family	Community	Land/Place	Intergenerational	Spirit
Language	Language	Language	Language	Language
Spending time together	Celebrations	Hunting	Part of a continuous history	Ceremonies
Relational Roles	Dancing/Singing	Gathering	Awareness of historical trauma	Cultural values
Responsibility	Ceremonies	Teaching children	Learning from Elders	Art
Namesakes & Nicknames	Service to others	Elders	Responsibility to future generations	Stories
Adoption	Mentoring	Exploration	Learning ancestral teachings to pass on to younger generations	Love, Humor, Truth
Togetherness	Rules, values, norms	Observation	Participation in cultural and community activities	Beauty
Trust and safety	Safety nets	Travel	Knowledge of family lineage	Dance
Sharing and support	Family relationships	Care for animals		Subsistence foods
Helping Elders	Social groups	Stories		Songs/Dance/Drum
Stories, family history	Collective belonging	Playing outside		Connection to ancestors and future generations
Recognition of personal talents	Cooperative Teams	Access to clean water		Collective mentality
	Subsistence sharing	Fish camp		Spiritual teachings
	Strong leadership	Survival skills		



<http://www.dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/Publications/pdf/CulturalResourcesGuide.pdf>

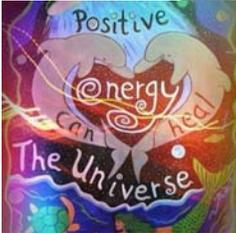
**TALK THERAPIES -
THE POWER OF TELLING STORY**

- ▶ Listening Circles
- ▶ Men's and Women's House Digital Story Telling



CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY HEALS

- ▶ Indigenous/Alaska Native-based societies integrated health and wellbeing in their social structures and practices.
- ▶ Alaska Native forms of talk therapy bring people together, strengthen support networks, creates strong coping skills, and supports healing.



LISTENING CIRCLES

The medicine is through learning how to listen.



STORYTELLING

- ▶ Storytelling are essential parts of culture for Alaska Native tribes.
- ▶ Storytelling is a powerful tool to talk about challenging situations and how they were handled. Some of the stories told are about:
 - ▶ History of a clan or cultural group and are required to be told a certain way.
 - ▶ Legends and have a level of epic mythology; these explain cosmology and world view.
 - ▶ About normal people and how they handled situations– sometimes good, and sometimes not so good.

STORYTELLING

- ▶ All of these are for the purpose of learning; they are a part of traditional psychology and assist people through the process of self-identification and decision making. It is common with traditional stories that the “moral” isn’t given; this allows the listener’s psyche to glean the lesson that is needed most at that time. In this way, stories can be told multiple times with new lessons learned in everytelling.
- ▶ Modern story tellers will give a moral so that western trained minds can understand.

TRADITIONAL FOOD and MEDICINE



According to World Health Organization (WHO) International

Mental health is a state of well-being in which:

- * an individual realizes his or her own abilities
- * can cope with the normal stresses of life
- * can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

“In this positive sense, mental health is the foundation for individual well-being and the effective functioning of a community.”

» WHO International

How long does it take to go from this...



To this?



How many people does it take?



The whole community!



Using Alaskan plants as food and medicine among Alaska Native communities and families:

- ▶ Have a higher intake of nutrient dense foods,
- ▶ Engage in higher levels of physical activity,
- ▶ Enjoy improved mental health (by connecting with culture and environment, and by increasing self-sufficiency), and
- ▶ Sustain more natural resources.





Use of traditional resources: Elders, Leaders, Community Doers

- * Invite Elders of the community, neighboring communities, state, or from other places to be a part of gatherings. Allow space for intergenerational transference of knowledge. i.e. berry picking.
- * Engage healthy role models of all ages to be a part of events to model or coach healthy life skills.
- * Drumming, singing, and dance groups.
- * Story circles: Contemporary and traditional.



Physical activity- Nomadic and Semi-nomadic people

Long distance walking regular activity.
Stimulates blood flow, oxygen flow, increased enzymatic release in planter reflex, and promotes lymphatic drainage.

Strength training for successful living
Competitions, dance, games, and warrior training.
“Always getting ready.”

Song, Dance, and Drumming:

- * When the drum beats, our hearts synchronize and we become “one.”
- * Unify the community harmonizing their thoughts and actions.
- * Teaches how to work as a team.
- * Strengthens support networks within the community creates strong coping skills and supports healing from traumatic events.

Healing the Individual and Community

- ▶ Connection to each other and the land
- ▶ Nutrition
- ▶ Physical Activity
- ▶ Meaningful work and place in society
- ▶ Ceremony, Rituals, Rites of Passage, and Celebrations
- ▶ Cultivation of Will
- ▶ Being present, higher consciousness or “Awareness of the Universe.”



Culture encompasses all of these and gives a relevant framework to work from.

“We are free to be who we are—
To create our own life
Out of the past and out of the present.

We are our ancestors.
When we can heal ourselves,
We also heal our ancestors,
Our Grandmothers,
Our Grandfathers and
Our Children.
When we heal ourselves, we heal
Mother Earth.”



Dr. Rita Pita Blumenstein

Thank you

- ▶ Qu yana—Central Yup'ik
- ▶ Ana-ba-see—Koyukon Athabaskan
- ▶ Qu yanaq—Inupiaq
- ▶ Dogidinh—in Deg Hit'an Athabaskan
- ▶ Gunalche'esh—in Tlingit
- ▶ Maasee'—Tanana Athabaskan
- ▶ Qu yanaa—Alutiiq
