

Decreasing Violence Using Cultural Traditions

Closing the Gap, Men's Health • September/October 2001

Sinte Gleska University Family Life Center is located on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in Mission, South Dakota. In existence for nearly two years, the Center helps students effectively deal with and manage anger. The curriculum—Violence Behavioral Cycle—teaches students that violence is continuous cycle.

“Native American youth—particularly the young men—often fall victim to the cycle of violence. They hold in anger until it builds, and then they unleash it on someone else. We use this program to help them work out their anger—before someone gets hurt,” said Kevin DeCora, prevention specialist.

“One of our conflict resolution techniques is meditation that draws on our Native American heritage—something our people have been doing for centuries. We sit the kids in a circle, we have an eagle feather, we light sage for purification, and then we meditate on the problem. This connects them to their culture, provides spiritual significance, and provides them with a solution to their problem,” DeCora added.

Anger begets violence, and therefore, violence prevention is also a strong component of the Center's program. Violence has increased tremendously on the Rosebud Indian Reservation—and is often more personal in nature. Often kids present with identity issues that lead to anger and violence. The Center's first priority is to help the kids realize the importance of, and to understand and be proud of their heritage as Lakota Indians, thereby taking pride in one another. This tactic helps to decrease the incidence of violence in the community.

“It's not like drive-bys in big cities where you never see your victim die because you're in a car or across the street. Here we have people beating each other to death. There are a lot of incidents of beatings with bats, jacks, and bars by youth on each other. We usually see the violence in the 13 to 25 age groups, with men usually the culprits. However, we've also seen a lot of women becoming more violent,” said DeCora.

To date, Sinte Gleska University Family Life Center has made significant progress in reducing the incidence of violence on the reservation. According to DeCora, “We've had a lot of success stories, and we're seeing a lot of our kids applying the anger management techniques they learn here, in the community.”

For more information, go to http://www.fcvp.org/flcs/sinte_gleska.htm. ❖

