

November 20, 2019

Good afternoon Chair Williamson, Chair Prozanski and members of the committee.

For the record my name is Trish Jordan. And I am the Executive Director of Red Lodge Transition Services based in Clackamas County. We are a Native American led organization that provides culturally focused programs for women releasing from jail, prison or treatment.

When I was approached to be on the advisory committee to this work, my first reaction was, "It depends. Will this just be talking heads? How will the information be used, and will it create system change?" I said yes because most people don't think of women in prison as being victims of crime. I believe it's important for our women to find a safe space to share their sacred stories, to be acknowledged, validated and empowered.

I think It's important to understand that as victims of violence and sexual assault, women and children are told to keep quiet; they are used and discarded, made to feel as if their lives don't matter. Left to carry the burden of shame and guilt. Physical and sexual abuse directly impacts a person's mind and self-worth. It leads to substance abuse, risky behavior, self hate and a lifetime of dysfunctional relationships. Trauma and more trauma.

Healing the Sacred Hoop is a group for Native women I coordinate at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility through Dept. of Corrections. I have done this for 6 years. After PSJ approached me, I met with the women to discuss whether they wanted to share their stories. They were hesitant, wanting to know what their stories would be used for and who would be helped by sharing about their trauma. Amy and the project intern Beezie came a few times to meet the women and discuss participation with the women and answer questions. This allowed the women opportunity to decide whether or not to work with Amy and Beezie on this project. The women shared their concerns and their interest, and so we worked to adapt the project to make it work for them in a good way, given their concerns and the restrictions of incarceration. To share a story of violence and/or abuse makes a person feel vulnerable in some ways. Not everyone feels comfortable sharing their story.

One of my former clients was sharing a story about her 3-year-old daughter asking her to put on the 'NAYA music'. It took her a while to realize her daughter was talking about the pow wow music played during Bow and Arrow Culture Night. This little girl loved to dance; she connected to the drum beat, which is considered the heartbeat of the people. That heartbeat connection is so important to us. It feeds our ancestors and heals our wounded spirit. At a molecular level, everything in our universe can be identified by its vibration... Traditional Native American music is a vibration that matches what our DNA is familiar with. Music helps us identify who we are, it becomes a tool of healing that soothes us and empowers us. People mean well, but unless you truly understand culture a 'one size fits all' approach does not work.

Many of the women often say they feel they have lost their identity. So connection with each other is healing. Culture is best practice and provides the best outcomes for Native American people.

I would have gone down a very different path in life if I hadn't gotten the support I needed from my family and my community. There needs to be more supportive services, and more trauma informed programming at a community and institutional level that people feel safe accessing. When someone is still on supervision, and they re-enter their community and get re-victimized, their first thought is "I can't have contact with law enforcement or else it's a probation/ parole violation." So then most people won't report or seek services after they get hurt because the police contact will count against them as a violation. So they don't get the help they need. Access to tribal community services is somewhat different, feels safer and can be life-saving. We want people to get help but without conditions that sometimes are required with accessing the system.

Once people realize that women in prison are victims of crime that is rarely reported, let alone prosecuted, maybe then we will understand that victims of crime are of all socio-economic levels. ALL of the women at Coffee Creek that I work with have been victimized. Women in prison matter. They are the fastest growing segment of our prison population. If we are going to break the cycle of incarceration, we need to address the abuse experienced prior to incarceration. Hurt people, hurt people.

Solving these problems needs to be supported at a community level. We need to address the trauma otherwise you're going to run out of band-aids. There's always a cause and effect. Our society is a very reactionary one. We only react to the effect. We treat the symptoms of the disease but rarely address the cause. Unless we support and include community and culture, I don't believe we'll ever truly change what is happening.

Programs like Red Lodge and Healing Hurt People, and many other community centered programs are doing some really great work to end the cycles of violence. We do big work every day with limited staff. But we need funding that allows us to help more people, funding that recognizes us as the experts, leaders and visionaries of our own healing.

Thank you for taking time to listen today.

Trish Jordan
Executive Director, Red Lodge Transition Services