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## Panel 6: Promising Approaches

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Valerie Davidson:

Okay, [speaking NATIVE LANGUAGE @ 00:02.6\_1008] come. We're going to get ready to get started. For those of you who are Yup'ik, might know this one. [MAKES SOUND]

So we're back. We've spent a lot of time over the last several days hearing from people about some of the challenges that we face in our communities, and while we were in Bethel and also in Napaskiak, and then in Emmonak, we also heard from people who were highlighting some promising practices and we're really excited about our panel today to hear more promising practices.

One of the folks who was on this panel, Liz Medicine Crow, from First Alaskans, was supposed to be on this panel today. She went—spoke yesterday instead, because in southeast Alaska they're having celebration. It's an event every two years where they get an opportunity to celebrate, which is why it's called celebration. Their traditional and customary practices of song and dance and if we could all pack up and do this and all be there, what an incredible time it would be. And I think that, you know, when we make the time to participate in cultural activities, things that are meaningful to us individually, that are meaningful to our families, and are also meaningful to our communities, it's really how we build resiliency, and we know that from experience, not just from ourselves and/or from our parents or our grandparents, but from our ancestors, that's how we are here today. And so we're very excited to hear from this panel and we're going to go in this order: we're going to hear first from Mary David, a member of the Nome Eskimo community, but she also is the executive vice president of Kawerak.

Next, we're going to hear from Bobbi Outten, the director of the Family Wellness Warriors Initiative, from Southcentral Foundation. And then finally, we're going to hear from Evon Peter, who's Gwich'in, and he is the executive director of the Indigenous Leadership Institute and also the CEO of Gwanzhii and he is also, I think, probably the youngest member of...the youngest chief of Fort Yukon, I think probably in their history. I'm sorry, Artic—did I say Fort Yukon? [Speaking Native Language @ 3:03\_1008], I'm sorry. Well, they would probably claim you, too, if they

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could. I'm from Bethel and we claim him, too, so... When you're that good, everybody wants to claim you.

So we're going to go ahead and here we have—we're going to hear from the panel members about promising practices and then like we did with the other panels, we're going to also have the opportunity to ask some questions and we're really excited to hear what you have to say, so at this point I'm just going to stop talking and turn it over to Mary.

*Mary David:*

Okay, thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for giving me the opportunity today to testify. Again, I'm Mary David, I'm the executive vice president at Kawerak. I was born, raised, and live in Nome, Alaska and if you don't know where that is, it's about northwest from here on the Norton Sound.

I hold our traditional value of love for children close to my heart, and therefore I'm happy to give these comments and recommendations. Kawerak is a tribal consortium in the Bering Straits region of Alaska—can you hear me okay? Okay—an area with 20 federally recognized tribes and 16 communities. Our service area is approximately 26,000 square miles, which is roughly the size of West Virginia. The region's population is about 9,000 people and about 75 percent of which is Alaskan Native. Kawerak was incorporated in 1973 and it first began providing services to children through the Head Start Program in 1979. So we have a long history of providing and working with children and families.

So bear with me for a little bit as I throw out just a few statistics. Within the city of Nome, the following are average number of calls for service per year between 2008 and 2013. So on average for assaults, they receive about 400 service calls; drunk down, 387; DUI, 41; and sexual assault, 33 on average service calls.

In 14 of our 15 region villages, assault charges were the top criminal activity reported and investigated between 2009 and 2013. Unfortunately, violence may occur when one or both parents are under the influence or are drinking alcohol, and more often, children are probably witness to the violence.

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One way to prevent child exposure to violence is by addressing alcohol and substance use in the family unit. Alcohol use and abuse seems prevalent in our region as well as home brew, synthetic or designer drugs and even heroin. But currently there's no residential substance abuse treatment program in the Bering Straits region. Clients with substance use treatment needs are required to leave their homes, leave their communities, leave their families to receive treatment outside, with very different cultural programming. This out of context approach to treatment without family and community support has been found to be greatly unsuccessful. Then upon their return home, the client finds little, if any, clinical work has involved their families and communities to assist in supporting their sobriety and their family wellness. Treatment service based on this region's traditions and cultures and includes the whole family is needed.

Fostering resilience among children is vital. Back in 2007 Kawerak conducted a youth activity and resource assessment. Every village identified the need for healthy youth activities and they wanted cultural activities. Kawerak has been fortunate to receive state and federal funding and grants to help children, youth and families, but funding due to our fiscal climate has reduced, and it is often more challenging to receive.

I would like to highlight, though, a Kawerak program that has made a difference in our region. In the last three years our Kawerak Wellness Program had contact with 2,300 children, providing the opportunity for children to build their self-esteem, resilience, and to learn about positive behavior so that the cycles of violence and negative behavior ends with them. Unfortunately, our wellness program is nearing the end of their grant cycle, and in fact, the grant ends the end of June, the end of July and the end of September. The Kawerak Wellness Program has planned activities around our community's and region's protective factors, and held summer camps, workshops for youth leaders, story circles, wellness fairs, they've sponsored trainings for our social justice task force, and have taken on efforts to reduce underage and adult heavy binge drinking within our region. We need more programs like these, as they provide

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beneficial and needed activities and education to our children and youth. Collaboration with other organizations is key and it's key to our success, and in fact, we do collaborate with the Family Wellness Warriors who will be talking next, but I'd like to mention a few other collaborative efforts in our region that have been successful.

Our Kawerak Wellness Program works together with a group called the Regional Wellness Forum. They are made up of representatives from various regional entities. The mission of the group is to provide a collaborative forum to seek and coordinate resources, increase communication and maintain relationships amongst each other. The goal of the forum is to restore a culture of wellness within the Bering Straits region. One of their big successes has been to get a rural rep seat on the Alcohol Beverage Control Board.

Another successful group in our region is called the Community Alcohol Safety Team or CAST, for short. The main goal is to develop an approach to reducing the negative consequences of underage drinking, adult binge and alcohol heavy drinking in the Bering Straits region. CAST works, again, in partnership with our regional wellness forum and other communities in Nome, Teller, Shishmaref and Savoonga. Activities include coordinating with the Community Alcohol Safety Team, the youth leadership at our Nome public schools, they conduct media outreach, they help coordinate wellness activities like our safety patrol, which patrols our streets during peak times of our year which include when the permanent fund dividend comes out and during Iditarod and New Year's. They provided Green Dot violence prevention or intervention training, they work with the social justice task force and lastly, they examine public policy and most recently they sent a letter to our city of Nome asking them to increase the sales tax on tobacco use and alcohol sales

Kawerak avoids using lack of funding as a barrier to address issues, when at all possible. About two years ago a cultural planners group was formed. This group is made up of key staff from various local agencies. I don't want to mention them all because there are just too many of them. The group pools resources to plan and host cultural activities for

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children within Nome and just recently they had an activity in April honoring our children. Nome had an activity and some of our village communities as well. Through efforts such as these, a movement will start where children become the priority and negative behavior, violence is eliminated or reduced.

Our children are in the school system nine months out of the year, up until the 12<sup>th</sup> grade so it only makes sense that education and skill development is provided there. Parenting classes in high school should be considered as a way to end the cycle of violence. Parenting education as a life skill course is beneficial and should be available for students interested in taking it. Unfortunately, funding for schools is reduced and therefore parenting education is not a priority. But I would like to tell you about another program offered by our Kawerak Wellness Program; it's called the My Life, My Body program. Pongana Pongawi, our community development coordinator, was recently certified to teach My Life, My Body in mainly junior high and high school, but it could be taught to a wider community. My Body, My Life is an evidence based program that displays promising practice in the prevention of violence against women ages 13 to 93. The focus of the program is to provide a multitude of tools that a woman could use to empower her to reduce the risk of violence and sexual assault.

With gun violence increasing—we hear about it in the news quite a bit, especially lately, particularly in schools or other public places—it is important that anger management training be provided and anger issues are addressed at an early age and throughout young adulthood. Norton Sound Health Corporation Behavioral Health at one time developed a mobile adolescent team, MAT. This model of care kept children within the region and provided wraparound substance abuse and counseling services. A comprehensive and coordinated effort focused on the child and parents and family similar to MAT is needed within our region. We have high rates of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse; all are the legacy of historic trauma which, just listening for a little bit, it sounds like you may have heard quite a bit in this last two days. But within our region we are

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at a point in our present day where we are becoming or beginning to become aware of our shared history and address these community levels of past hurt.

Locally, the Nome Social Justice Task Force began hosting difficult community conversations and provided training to service delivery agencies and the public on historic trauma. Kawerak Wellness staff began delivering talks on the Alaskan Native history to junior high and high school students in Nome this past year. Education and awareness on historical trauma is the first step in the healing process and must be offered in a holistic and culturally based program approach.

Our communities are generally pretty small. There are offenders returning to our community and they need to be given the chance to turn their lives around and to be told what they did was not acceptable. The community needs to give them the chance and be willing to forgive them. There needs to be education and resources for the offender so they do not continue the cycle of abuse again. The victim also needs education and support so that both the victim and the offender can reside in the same community.

Kawerak first began operating a child advocacy center back in 2002 and the previous panel kind of alluded to that. The best practice for a child who is exposed to violence, either being the victim or witness to the abuse, should be to bring the child to a child advocacy center for a forensic interview and forensic medical exam. We have a CAC within our region. Best practices is not being followed in our region on a consistent basis. Law enforcement either does not refer the family to OCS or to the CAC, or if the case is referred to OCS, they are not bringing the child in but are doing the interview out in the field. Although law enforcement and OCS is getting better at bringing children who have been sexually abused to the CAC, they are still conducting partial interviews in the field, thus making the child disclose more than once. All law enforcement and multidisciplinary team members should have the Alaska First interviewing training. In our region, only one officer and one trooper received the training since the program started back in January of 2013.

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We would like to see training held in each region and that all MAT members be required to attend.

I want to switch gears just for a few minutes and talk about state and tribal involvement, although I won't go into great detail. I do want to state, though, that numerous prior commissions over the last several decades have received testimony and analyzed the high incidence of family violence and the lack of public safety and access to justice in rural Alaska. Unquestionably, exposure of Native children to violence in rural Alaska is a consequence of the lack of public safety and access to justice in rural Alaska as such violence occurs during episodes of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and substance abuse related offenses that are not being adequately addressed in rural Alaska.

The conclusion reached over and over is that these issues must be addressed at the local level and the state working in partnership with tribes to build capacity locally to address public safety and access to justice in rural Alaska. The Rural Justice Commission made numerous findings and recommendations to the state and the state should review and consider implementing these. The Rural Justice found that the state's resistance to tribal courts is a barrier to many proposed solutions, and recommended tribes and the state reach agreement regarding tribal jurisdiction.

And talking about law enforcement a little more, within the Bering Straits region, Kawerak employs 10 village public safety officers, stationed in seven villages. Eight of our villages do not have a VPSO. VPSOs are the first responders in communities that they live in. Despite the lack of equipment, funding and support, the VPSOs have made valiant efforts to defuse volatile situations, prevent the escalation of problems, deter crimes, serve as a communications link with the troopers, coordinate search and rescue efforts, assist with fires, investigate minor offenses, work with schools on crime prevention and education to youth, and provide basic law and order in the village that they serve. Those who persist despite the conditions and remain VPSO have proven that the VPSO program can work. Community policing cannot take place over the telephone or by a trooper visiting a village three

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times a year. Wherein there is a delayed response to reports of crime or reports of harm, the perpetrator has free rein to victimize others. Victims may recant when they are finally interviewed, evidence may be lost, and prosecutions may not occur because the investigation was delayed for so long. This only serves to normalize criminal behavior and perpetuate social dysfunction. There is a certain baseline of state services that all state citizens should have the right to expect. Law enforcement and justice, whether it be in an urban area or rural Alaska, is a baseline service.

In conclusion, our region has made some positive inroads to addressing social issues, but to reduce the exposure of violence among Alaskan Native children requires a holistic approach. Prevention and comprehensive treatment options in a culturally appropriate way must be considered in order for efforts to be successful. There is a need for more law enforcement, trained law enforcement, and more treatment facilities that accept the whole family, and more aftercare services at the local level. Additionally, parents and community members need to be educated about the long term effects and impacts of children exposed to violence. Policies and programs must also encourage, build, and rehabilitate offenders, not just incarcerate them. Programs that are a success or are showing promise, like our Wellness Program, should have regular funding source so that those activities and efforts can continue. Opportunities need to be available at the rural communities, not just in hub communities like Nome or in urban communities like Anchorage.

Alaska's children are our most vital resource. Ensuring they are raised in a safe, loving and nurturing home should be our number one priority. Quyanara for giving me the time and opportunity to testify today.

*Valerie Davidson:*

Quyanara, Mary, we're going to hear from Bobbi next.

*Bobbi Outten:*

Good afternoon, thank you, honorable co-chair Shenandoah and Davidson, and respected members of the task force, and really, to all who are here today, taking time out of our

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very brief, short, Alaskan summer for this vital subject. Appreciate everyone being here today and for the opportunity to speak and I do pray that I have the elders' permission here to speak today.

I know you've all been sitting here for two days doing a lot of listening and I'm one of the final witnesses, so I'll try to get to the point. I am Bobbi Outten, Director of Southcentral Foundation's Family Wellness Warriors Initiative. I am Anishinaabi and Norwegian. I grew up in Hanes, Alaska, which is down on our panhandle. I am a mother of eight, a grandmother of nine—just had my ninth one four weeks ago—and I have a personal story of living with domestic violence for 16 years and I see through the eyes of one who has experienced harm and trauma. But today I am here to talk to you about the Family Wellness Warriors Initiative, what we call FWWI; some call F double W I, but that'll tongue twist you, which is our answer to the problem of family violence and child maltreatment.

To provide a clear picture of who we are and who I'm representing, Southcentral Foundation is an Alaskan Native non-profit Native Health corporation. We are established under the tribal authority of Cook Inlet Region, incorporated in 1982 to improve the health and social conditions of Alaska Native people. Southcentral Foundation is compacted to serve Indian Health Service beneficiaries in Anchorage and Southcentral Alaska on behalf of the federal government. We provide health services to nearly one-third of all active users of IHS services in Alaska and we do so at a quality second to none in the nation. Our corporate vision: a Native community that enjoys physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellness. That expresses the broad view shared by many Native communities.

We heard this morning from Elsie Boudreau and other witnesses that were calling for and addressing the need for programs that could bring healing, and I'm going to talk to you about a program that our tribal leaders, our elders and Alaskan Native people statewide have endorsed.

Southcentral Foundation has dedicated extensive resources while working with Alaskan Native leaders across the state

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to develop a uniquely Native response to the family violence and child maltreatment, that as you've heard for almost two days straight, is damaging our children, wrecking our families, dividing our communities and really, ultimately destroying the core of who we are meant to be. We call this response the Family Wellness Warriors Initiative. The initiative was developed 15 years ago—I've been there all 15—by Alaskan Native leaders who recognized the failing of existing approaches. What did they recognize? They recognized that we had too many of our children being taken out of our families and being placed with non-Native homes. They recognized we had too many of our men being taken from our communities and sent to prison where they learned to act and think like felons. We had too many of our women going from one bad relationship to the next, and perhaps worst of all, this was surrounded by a pervasive silence where our people lived with shame and guilt and total isolation. So as you know, many dulled their feelings by eating—excessive eating—alcohol, drugs and other risky behavior; all short term solutions with long term consequences.

So our Alaskan Native leaders looked at the evidence base and what was then the current approaches long before our grant makers and our third party payers made it the standard. They quickly concluded that our Western solutions were ineffective at best, and more importantly, often caused more harm than prevented harm. So unfortunately the funding sources and policy makers looked at the exact same evidence base and what they concluded was that basically to be effective meant do more of the same, like you heard from Mr. Walt Monegan earlier this morning. More arrests, more prosecutions, more jail sentences, more taking children into state custody, which I agree with Walt is not the solution.

So I am here today to emphasize the positive and talk about how we are moving to end violence in Native communities within this generation with our Family Wellness Warriors Initiative. This is a decidedly different approach, it's grounded in our conviction of the power of story and relationship. So FWWI, as we refer to it, it's important to say, was developed by and continues to evolve under

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leadership of Alaskan Native people. We approach these issues by focusing upstream before things happen, rather than responding after someone has been harmed. And we look to Native men as part of the solution, not as the problem, and we call on them to resume their traditional role as protectors of the family. It's a call to use their strength to protect as in days of old when they would die for their family, not to use their strength to harm. We avoid, and in fact, it's more than that—we refuse—to use the terms “victim” and “perpetrator”, which really gives us a snapshot in time. It's really where you interrupt the cycle of violence and we often find that today's perpetrator, as the world says, was yesterday's victim. Instead we say those who have caused harm and those who have experienced or been harmed.

So what exactly do we do at FWWI? Let me see if I can explain a very complex program in a few short minutes. We do provide over 15 multi-day trainings. They are education and training—actually CEU and college accredited—so it's education and training. We provide it annually throughout the state of Alaska. The trainings provide skills and tools to two different populations, both what we call natural helpers, which basically means a safe person that the community identifies. It doesn't matter if you're a grandma, maintenance worker, teacher, officer; if you're safe, you're a natural helper. So we provide training to those who want to learn to help other people as well as to those who have experienced or caused harm. We work with adults 21 and older, and we provide these five day intensive trainings both rurally and on our Anchorage campus.

So our trainings utilize old traditional storytelling methods grounded in Alaskan Native traditions in strengths, combined with cutting edge trauma therapy. Basically we create a safe environment where people can share their story and be safe enough to risk sharing, those who have experienced trauma and harm. And we really give them tools for what a healthy family looks like and feels like. They gain knowledge on how to evaluate and address the root cause of behaviors, they explore how past experiences contribute to how people experience them and how we relate and interact with other people based on our experiences. They gain an understanding of how shame and anger impacts other

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people and how we harm through those things. So basically our large group teachings—and when we're in a rural community, it's always all Alaskan Native American Indian presenters—they do a large group teaching and they share their personal story as it relates to the topic that they're teaching. We have a set curriculum. It has been written by our people. It is combined with the presenter's personal story either of how they've been harmed or how they have caused harm, both. After each teaching they meet in a small group setting—we call it a learning circle—for an hour and a half with two trained group leaders and that's where that safe environment and that kind of miracle happens, and that's where people learn to live differently, to have hope, to have that restoration to look at their identity and the messages that so many who have been harmed believe, that somehow it was my fault or all of those lies. We replace those lies with truth. So in this safe environment they are able to take an honest and open look at their story and gain the tools to reverse the effects of trauma.

So that is what the process did for me. What I learned when I started—and I started as a volunteer over 15 years ago—was not only was I harmed by domestic violence in my 16 year marriage, but my choosing to stay in it for so long negatively impacted my ability to be the healthy, strong mom that I longed to be for my children. Why? I was distracted by my need to survive. My children did not get the best of me that they deserved. My story is just one of thousands. We have had three generations of families come through our trainings. We watch people heal, to get their voice back, to embrace their culture and most importantly, if we do one thing well, it's to give hope, hope that life can be different, hope that you can have the ability to change and the tools to live it differently. And I gained that hope, I gained my voice—I'm a very shy person—I gained my voice and I've used those tools to not return to domestic violence. And there has been healing for both me and my children. My two oldest daughters have experienced the training as well.

We rely really heavily on our 150-plus volunteers and they share the same passion I have for healing for our people. Our volunteers gift over 10,000 volunteer hours annually and they have experienced personal healing and are

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committed to helping others find the healing. To date, more than 8,000 people have attended our trainings and workshops. When we work with a rural community and amazing programs like Kawerak, Norton Sound Health Corporation, we use a three year model and it's designed for long term sustainability under community driven leadership. And I should stress that we never, ever enter another region without personal, formal invitation. We do not impose or go in unless invited. When we are invited, over the course of three years we work with their leadership to replicate the program.

In year one there's a community readiness assessment preparing the community and training their leadership in our philosophy, the curriculum and the core foundation of the program. In year two, that committee identifies 50 natural helpers from the community who they want to train and we actually go into their selected location. Sometimes it's a hub, sometimes it's a village, a smaller village. And we lead it while they're shadowing us. In year three, it shifts and now they are leading—the 50 natural helpers in that steering committee—[CLEARS THROAT]—excuse me—are now leading the trainings and we're shadowing and supporting for whatever they need from us. And it shifts to being open to the community or those currently being harmed. It is no longer focused on natural helpers, but open to those experiencing harm. We work with three regions at a time, up to three at the most, and we currently have a waiting list of several regions and that is both locally and internationally.

At our trainings, there's a couple unique things you will always see. One is you will always see our elders and our tribal leaders leading the way in breaking the silence and sharing their personal story. It's one of the secrets to the success, is they lead. And when we began, our elders gave us permission to the next generation. We had heard for so long—and I lived and breathed—what happens behind your doors stays behind your doors, you don't talk about it. And the elders stood up and they said we are going to talk about it, it's not okay to be harmed, and they gave permission to the next generation to start to break that silence. Alaskan Native leadership has from the very beginning led by example in sharing their stories and breaking the silence about their own lives. Southcentral Foundation is confident

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that our methodologies and processes serve as a viable answer.

So how do we know? Over the last several years we have conducted through independent evaluators throughout the nation, several evaluation—extensive evaluations, and I can happily tell you that it has proven that FWVI's program has statistical significance. It builds protective factors and resiliency skills to...for a person's ability to effectively deal with domestic violence, child sexual abuse and child neglect. So what have we found? We've found that not only is it evidence among participants, but here's what they show reduction in: They report positive change with reductions in depression, substance abuse, trauma symptomology and anxiety. They...difficulty controlling anger and the risk of purposeful harm or the threat to harm, whether to yourself or to another is reportedly reduced. Our evaluation findings also show significant positive change associated with key protective factors, including enhanced family cohesion, cultural connectedness, self-esteem and spiritual wellbeing.

Gender comparisons, I have found extremely interesting and they indicate positive change is significant with both men and women, however, you may be interested to know that men report a stronger degree of positive change in depression, substance abuse, trauma symptomology, anger control and self-esteem maintained over time. 74.98 percent of program participants report positive change in trauma symptomology. Our average for the ACE—you've heard a lot about that—of people who are attending is five. Five ACES.

So we have found challenges. Funding is a constantly challenge. Southcentral Foundation's governance and leadership are extremely supportive with direct funds. A number of private foundations have contributed over the years. Some Alaskan Native regional corporations have provided funding for their shareholders. We have received federal grants from both Indian Health Service and the Department of Justice, and the state of Alaska has provided support through major three year operating grants from our governor's domestic violence initiative. However, with the exception of Southcentral Foundation, all of our funding is

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time limited. Third party insurance payers do not share our view and there is no permanent reimbursement method available to us.

Another challenge the program faces is our barrier crimes. Our barrier crime laws prevent people who have committed certain type of offenses from participating. The Indian Child Protection Act and Alaska Barrier Crime Acts, which are very strict, both prevent FWWI from using men and women who have the potential to be powerful teachers by virtue of having realized and changed the errors of their own thinking and behaviors. These laws allow no exception or special conditions to be made, so we lose a very powerful teaching tool. We do believe violence is preventable and as Alaskans, it is up to us to make this a safe place for our children and for future generations, and for my nine grandbabies

I personally know that power can be used to harm or to heal. And so I just want you to imagine something with me for a moment. Imagine the impact if the power of a man was used to protect and help his family to heal, to bring healing to his family. Imagine the impact if the power of a woman was used to love and nurture her family. Our people have taught me about the undeniable strength of those who have been harmed and those who have caused harm to reclaim their lives and give back to their communities after a lot of destruction and despair. I've watched it with my own eyes and I have lived it out in my own story.

So in summary, Southcentral Foundation's Family Wellness Warriors prevention model for family violence is replicable, sustainable and it provides leaders with the ability to affect change in violence and abuse at every level. We are seeing lives changed and men and women empowered to live differently. We are seeing renewed commitment to families and parents determined to parent their children differently from the harmful ways they may have been parented. We are seeing the restoration of hope, hope that life can be different, and the hope that indeed we can stop the cycle of abuse, neglect and domestic violence in this generation. This change happens and this hope is born one individual at a time, or as we say, "One warrior at a time." And we

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believe in princess warriors. It is expensive, but the expense pales in comparison to just continuing to what has been done. I thank you for listening and I thank you for the opportunity to speak.

*Valerie Davidson:*

Quyana Bobbi. Evon?

*Evon Peter:*

[Speaking NATIVE LANGUAGE @ 44:14\_1008]. Looks like a Haudenosaunee flag over there. And you know, it made—it reminded me of when I first became a chief years ago, I crossed paths with Chief Oren Lyons of the Onondaga and he sat me down in South Africa when we were supposed to be at a UN meeting and he said, “You need to know something.” And he proceeded to tell me a story that took two days. And at the end of it he got a call and he said, “Oh, I’ve got to get back home.” They had lost one of their other chiefs among the Haudenosaunee, so I don’t think either of us ever made it into that meeting, but I made it to this one although it took me quite a bit. Just last night I was coming across from a place called Sisolek, which is on the coast off of Kotzebue and was going on a boat through some pretty big waves with a thick fog and every once in a while an iceberg would show up on the left or right side of the boat, but somehow I was able to make it here to be with you and I want to thank you for the invitation for me to be here to share with you some of my knowledge and thoughts around Alaskan Native children, you know, the violence that’s impacting our Alaskan Native children and that our communities are experiencing.

Twenty one years ago I was a young person. I know many of you see me as quite young, still, but—and I was young 21 years ago, too—and I was a high school dropout heavily involved with alcohol and drugs and I had a realization that only I have control over the choices I make in my life and that I could choose to use what I already understood was my capacity as a leader only for good things in life and no one could make me do differently. And so 21 years ago I made that choice, the commitment to...at first it was simply to be a father for my children when I had them. I have four of them now. Later it evolved into much more than just being a good father. It was commitment to a life of being there to help bring about spiritual, cultural, and social change, at first for my own family and people, but then it

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expanded around the state, so [speaking NATIVE LANGUAGE @ 46:41\_1008] [LAUGHS] And then it eventually brought me around the country and world.

But then I came home five years ago—actually, I shouldn't say I came home—I focused my work on home five years ago, specifically on protection of our children from unnecessary suffering and on supporting them to become a part of the healing of our peoples. I speak honestly with our young people about the plight of our peoples and create safe spaces for them to share their stories, heal, and build supportive relationships with one another and with healthy adults that are around them. In the past year alone, my team and I have helped to lead five week long culturally based youth violence abuse and suicide prevention programs. Over the last winter I have been in nine Alaskan communities and spoken with over 600 youth. I work closely with many other Native and non-Native healers and counselors and together we have led two week long programs in this last year, aimed at supporting adults and villages to both heal for their own benefit and the benefit of their family, but then also to receive training to be able to reach out and help others to bring an end to alcohol and substance abuse as well as the associated violence, neglect, abuse, and tragedy.

Within the past few days I walked in on one of our young men, a boy. He had a knife to his body and he was shaking uncontrollably in tears. I walked over to him and sat down, was able to talk him down and eventually he handed me over the knife that he was holding. He was able to share for the first time what was heavy on his heart and mind. I asked him if it was all right to bring in a few other local counselors and healers and leaders from the community that I was in, and he agreed, so I went out and reached out to a few people who are trained in this work of suicide prevention and counseling, but then I also brought in a new person from that community who I knew that wanted to become involved and the first thing she said to me was, "I don't know what I'm supposed to do," and I said, "That's why I'm inviting you to come with us, because I want you to sit and listen and learn," and I also told her that if her intuition guided her to share something, then it would be all

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right for her to share, because I felt confident in the rest of the team that I'd brought there for that intervention. In all of our presence, he made a commitment not to harm himself, and just as importantly, every one of us that were adults that were sitting there with him made a lifelong commitment to be there for him.

I'm sharing that story because it's really strong in my mind as I come here to sit with you, but also because I think it reflects that, you know, of all the four adults that were there with me on that day, only one actually had a job that had to do specifically with this. The rest were just passionate adults from the community who had themselves taken up a part of this movement to help reach out and support other people around them and in their community.

My knowledge on this issue comes from real life experience, both my own abuse, neglect and exposure as an Alaskan Native child, as well as from hundreds of Alaskan Native people that I have listened to and supported over the years. I could tell you story after story of the heartbreak and abuse that many of our Alaskan Native children have experienced and continue to face. I could tell you in-depth of the hardship that permeates many of our families as they struggle to build light amongst too numerous of suicides, abuse, and domestic violence. The extremely high level of exposure to violence, to alcohol and substance abuse and to neglect has created a normalization of these destructive habits among many of our families and communities. The reasons these high numbers are many and they are often part of a complicated history, the histories of their own personal families, their communities and the state and nation as a whole—our people are carrying wounds of their own lifetime as well as those from multiple generations into the past, people carrying detrimental ideologies and practices of colonization once carried out as spiritual, linguistic, cultural and social assault on our peoples resulting in a breakdown of our societal stability and the infliction of trauma.

As Alaskan Native people, our culture and traditional practices have been under assault while our people struggle to overcome inequality in trying to fit into a Western political,

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social, and economic system. The struggle for self-determination continues to this day and is well documented in the recent Indian Law and Order Commission report. This report gives voice to the surmounting stresses that we as Alaskan Native people feel on a daily basis. One of my friends in the States called that “ethno-stress”, the stress that colonized indigenous peoples go through every day. We’re at a critical time for the protection of Alaskan Native peoples’ wellbeing and future. As Alaskan Natives, we have several very important things to do.

First, we must choose to make the changes in our own life to walk a healing path and to become the example of how we want our children to act and behave. This is especially true for our leaders, both the formal leaders of our tribes and institutions as well as the elders, culture bearers and community based leaders.

Second, we must choose to intervene within our families and communities to stop the perpetuation of violence and abuse. Too often I’ve heard stories of mothers telling their own daughters not to say anything about sexual abuse in order to protect an older relative in their family from persecution. This is devastating to the child and one of the major contributing factors to multigenerational abuse and neglect. Finally, we have to choose to do something to help make the change we want to see among our peoples and communities. To our people that are faced with the everyday perpetuation of violence and silence, these may seem like extremely difficult tasks, and they are. But they are also achievable and vitally important to our people right now. Every one of us has a role in healing. As simple as some may seem or as difficult as others may seem, they are all important.

And to our state of Alaska and federal lawmakers, you have a critically important role as well. The state of Alaska needs a major shift in its policies and approaches to working with Alaskan Native tribes and people. We are not an enemy of the state. This is our home and we love it. But we need to be respected and honored as equals. Most of us carry a real positive vision of sustainability for all of us here in Alaska. Alaskan Native tribes must have governmental self-

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determination and co-management over natural resources. Tribal governments and the state leaders must work collaboratively to address the challenges facing Alaska, in particular, the protection of our children. This will require many state leaders to shift from an approach based in a dominant colonial mindset to one of equity, respect, and reciprocity. Please stop fighting our peoples' basic human rights to provide for the survival and wellbeing of our people. Let us have Alaska set an example for the world on how to heal relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and have it be reflected in government and institutional practice. US federal lawmakers need to take a few strong stands and fulfill its government to government responsibility with Alaskan Native tribes.

First, if the state of Alaska fails to honor federal law that is intended to protect Alaskan Native children and people, the federal government needs to take necessary measures to bring the state of Alaska into compliance. Second, Congress needs to remove application of public law 2A to Alaska. Legislation that inhibits the self-determination of our tribes and tribal institutions at the local level stifles our capacity to address the protection of our children. It is like telling someone, "You need to protect your children", but denying them the authority to implement initiatives to carry out the mission to protect them.

This brings me to my third point. The federal government needs to lift restrictions and minimize the bureaucratic process on funding that is provided to help our people. The funding should also be increased for the protection of our children and behavioral health. I mean, we get by with very little in a lot of the work we do. Our people are well prepared to develop and administer initiatives. It is time for the federal government to let go of the colonial relationship with our tribes. Let us enter into a new era of equality and real trust and responsibility. In order for promising approaches to be implemented at a scale that is needed to address the issues that we are facing, it will require Alaskan Natives and our institutions as well as the state and federal governments to step up. If we want to address the protection of our children and tackle the contributing factors among Alaskan Native communities, this has to become a priority at all levels.

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I want to focus a little bit now on some of the promising approaches and how they're implemented in some of the work that we've been doing. I'm going to cover a few of the main points. So first of all, all the initiatives that we're doing need to fit into a broader, long term vision. When I was a young chief, I thought that I would be able to change the world in a year. And I jumped on my war pony with my bow and arrow and marched on Juneau and D.C. and marched into the homes of my community members, talking about many issues like the ones we're covering and I quickly realized that it was going to take time, and a really knowledgeable elder from the Lower 48 actually said—for his people—he said, “It took them 500 years to mess us up this bad; it's going to take a few years for us to pull ourselves back together.” There's a lot of wisdom in what he said. I realize that the vision for wellbeing and healing of our people and the transformation of the way that we're relating to each other and to the state and federal government is going to probably surpass my lifetime, but we're planting strong, clear seeds with the work we're doing now.

The other piece is we need to bring together interested institutions for partnership and collaboration. I'm going to focus some on the work up in the Northwest Arctic where I've really been focused for a few years. When they first invited me up there to help with—at the beginning, suicide prevention among young people—I looked at the other institutions and individuals who are already doing something or wanting to do something and brought them together and actually extended a partnership with Kawerak Wellness down in Nome, as well. And we built a larger initiative to share knowledge, information and learning with each other so we could become stronger in what we're doing. The other piece is it has to be holistic in nature. You might wonder why I emphasize the state and federal relationship with our tribes in my testimony here, but that's all a piece of the bigger picture of moving our community towards wellbeing and balance and preventing violence of our children and among our people. We have to be flexible, the programs have to be flexible to the individual and circumstances. Every one of us in here is unique, even if we're subscribed to a

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particular religious belief or system or church, we think differently and understand it differently and we need to meet people with where they're at, and we have to meet communities with where they're at. I believe others before me mentioned that there's no cookie cutter solution that we could just apply to every individual or community or state or a place in the state.

The approaches that we've been taking are rooted in cultural and spiritual values, practices and ways of life. It's like offering in the talking circles which are really important aspects to many of our programs in the Family Wellness Warrior Initiative, the ones that I run; the behavioral health services programs and many of them have a similar methodology in how to work with people. But those values at the foundation of it's really important and not only that, when working with young people and communities when we're—for example, the camp that I just left and I'm going to go back to tomorrow—we're taking them out to go hunt hoobrook, which is a bearded seal and they're learning the practical skills of survival in the Arctic, in the land, and so not only are they having the opportunity to heal, but they're building positive self-identity while they're there.

Another piece of the programming is we do not try to push beliefs on others, but we encourage people to find their own way with guidance and exposure to other people that are leaders and elders in their traditions. So at the groups and the teams that I pull together, we'll sometimes have a pastor and a culture bearer and an elder and someone from the LGBTQ community, and so young people who may be coming from different situations and context may be able to see someone among the leadership team who they can relate to and who they can go to for guidance and insight in addressing and working through some of what they might be going through. We develop those foundations consciously with what we're doing. We involve people who embrace wellbeing and lifestyles of passion. I think I mentioned that in my story earlier. When it's just a job for someone, it's like things fall short and don't happen, things that need to get done for a project initiative fall through the cracks and they're not there for the long haul when sometimes we have to be up late or up early and work long days to put in the

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effort to be there for people. We incorporate elder and peer leadership into the work that we're doing, and I'm going to give you examples of some of these when covering the bigger thematic areas. We identify and support community based leaders of all ages, so rather than being dependent on me as an outside trainer or facilitator or healer, we're constantly in the work of trying to identify others who we see are wanting to become—join a path of healing and wellness, or who have natural leadership abilities inherent within them that we can help to build upon and support them to be leaders within their own family and their own community.

So how does this look in programmatic terms? So in the Northwest what we did was we looked at a few different areas. One is the youth leaders program with the Northwest Arctic Borough school district, that was already in motion when we—when I—began doing the work up there, but we integrated into them and we incorporated cultural aspects into the program that they were leading, and that's a regional retreat, and then the youth leaders are doing stuff, activities in their own villages. We built on—the camp that I just left, which is called Camp Begok, and that's a culturally based subsistence camp where we're identifying—we partner with the Department of Juvenile Justice, with the school district, with local pastors and behavioral health services at Maniilaq and we reach out and invite young people who might not have opportunities or might be coming from challenging circumstances to participate in that program. And then we overlap them, oftentimes with some of the youth leaders in the villages. So we have kind of overlapping initiatives, and I think that not initiative can reach everybody and not one approach can reach everybody and so we try to create multiple ones that layer upon each other.

The next one is the Arctic Institute, which I would say is probably similar to the Family Wellness Warriors Initiative model where we bring in and identify people for themselves to go through a healing process and build in resiliency as well as training. One of our most recent ones which we just concluded last week—which is why I wasn't able to provide you with my written testimony yet, and you'll get it in about a day or two, probably—is we are identifying 15 individuals

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from 12 villages bringing them in for their own work on themselves as far as healing and also to become trained as substance abuse and alcohol support group holders of space. And so it—a lot of it has to do with those circle talks, training people to be able to be comfortable holding them and letting them understand that they don't have to be a trained therapist or counselor to be able to hold a support group space and having that open to people. And that's a part of helping—we're working on that to help reduce recidivism back to into treatment centers and incarceration once they return back to their villages because there's not a lot of support at the village level.

We also have been doing Arctic Institutes to help wellness teams within those very same villages, so those recovery support leaders, as we call them, have the added support of others in the village who've been through this similar experience, so that they can have added support at the village level for hosting the support groups.

Then we're also working with the behavioral health services with therapists, with the village based counselors, and integrating them into the programming—all the programming—I just mentioned, and so all these layers of programming that we're doing within that region within 12 villages have kind of been overlapping for several years. We're doing a 10 year analysis of data before we really report on what the outcome of the work is, but the initial results after four years are really promising, especially with the young people where we've had a really heavy focus. But we don't like to talk about it because we want to wait to see, really, because they say statistically it takes 10 years for us to demonstrate the impact of the work that we're doing. But I can tell you from personal experience I've seen the transformation of many young people and adults that we've been able to work with over the years with a lot of the programming we've been offering.

But ultimately what I feel like is needed is a spiritually and culturally based movement of healing and recovering among Alaskan Native peoples—not only Alaskan Native peoples—but a lot of the non-Native people don't even realize they're suffering, which is why they perpetuate kind of those

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colonial, dominant ideologies in their decision making and practices. But we really need a strong movement that's also supported at the state and federal level and with private partners. We have private partners in a lot of the work we do as well, whether that's foundations or even for profit companies that understand the value of what we're doing and want to make contributions to it.

And the last thing that I'll share with you is I do have a vision and...to expand, because I think that the scale of what we're facing is pretty substantial and even with great programs like Family Wellness Warriors Initiative, the rural human services program, the programs that we're running, there's still more people that need to be able to be reached and to have accesses to services and I'll probably be working on this in the next year or two. But I'd like to develop a few pilot projects that are culturally based, residential, holistic wellness centers that are coupled with the regional hospitals or medical centers where we could be doing multiple things simultaneously. We could be doing treatment working with the whole family, so we could have the area where whole families are getting to live together and they're going through holistic treatment with themselves, with their family coming together. We could host some of the youth programming and activities like the Arctic Institutes or the Camp Begoks that are running. We could have adult healing and training like the Arctic Institutes or Family Wellness Warrior Initiative-type gatherings, and we could build partnerships with others to bring them in, and part of this stems from—you know, for example the impact of alcohol, as you probably heard in the last couple days, is very substantial and we have a lot of people that might end up in a medical institution with an alcohol related injury or they're so intoxicated they need an IV and minerals to help bring them back to balance, and then they're just let back out again. And we want to create an opportunity for people to be welcomed into another space that has Alaskan Native leadership there to be able to work with them to really work on their wholistic wellbeing so they don't end up back in that system and back in that cycle, and it would be another addition to a lot of the other initiatives and projects and work that we're doing. But it would also be a center, you know, I envision it where we could invite younger generations of our people, especially before or

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maybe while they're in college, to come for a month and receive training and we'll have the, what we call [speaking NATIVE LANGUAGE @ 1:06:44\_1008] Yup'iks call it [speaking NATIVE LANGUAGE @ 1:06:45\_1008], downstate you guys call it sweat lodges; we could have sweat lodges, how to tan skins, how to make baskets, so they're learning skills while they're doing talking circles, while they're learning their Native language, so we're really building the young people into the vision of what we would like them to be and allowing them to find their own pathway to what it is that they're interested in, and that could also be a part of these residential or these wellness...holistic wellness centers that are culturally based and...

And if not, many—several pilot projects of that I would like to work towards having at least one of those in the state. So with that I just want to thank you again for allowing me to be here to share, you know, a few of my thoughts and reflections on the prevention of violence for our children and the importance and I really want to thank you for drawing this attention and focus to the issue, and I hope, in particular, that people heard some of what it is that we had to say. [speaking NATIVE LANGUAGE @ 1:07:47\_1008].

*Valerie Davidson:*

Quyana, Evon. So we're going to go ahead and open it up for questions from the members of the committee.

*Joanne Shenandoah:*

This is to all of you really. I'd just like to say that you all mentioned partnership and working together, and I just want to congratulate you on your dedication. I think it's so vital and so important, and yes, this is an Iroquois flag. I am from the Haudenosaunee Iroquois Confederacy, and we know from our peacemaker, (inaudible @ 1:08:26), that he used one arrow, broke it, put five together, and he couldn't break that, to prove to us that is a lesson that we can work together and make change. And I really am very excited about all of your programs and want to see more and hear more, so I hope that you will expound a little bit more on what you're doing as well, and consider that for testimony. I don't have a specific question but I just wanted to say that...how powerful it is that everyone's going to hear this, nationwide, non-Native and Native people, and will learn from your experiences, so this is a very vital time in

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transformation for us all, and thank you for your testimonies very much.

*Valerie Davidson:* Do any other committee members have questions? Dee?

*Dolores Bigfoot:* Okay, take a deep breath. I have to say I didn't realize that Sheri was working with you, because I have worked with her for a long time, so that's really exciting to hear. I sent a note to Marilyn and I thought, you know, we...trying to figure out how we can acknowledge all of the things that have—has happened—and so I came up with a new disorder. [CHUCKLES] So I changed it a little bit, but...

*Woman:* Okay.

*Dolores Bigfoot:* But—yeah, changed it a little bit. It's colonization-induced stress disorder. Think we should ...[CHUCKLES]

*Woman:* (inaudible @ 1:10:16).

*Dolores Bigfoot:* Yeah, we need to put it in the DSM. But it's really exciting to hear everything that you're doing and recognizing that the healing is coming from within the communities and I really like the idea of building on people gaining skills, and then being able to teach those skills. That was how, I think, all of us learned initially, you know, whether it was peeling potatoes or taking care of a garden or, you know, beadwork—that that was...you know, we...somebody explained it to us, told us the purpose and you know, and most of the things we did was either, you know, it all had a purpose, whether it was to give as a gift, to prepare for food, to join in ceremony, I mean there was a purpose and I guess that's what I see from all of the examples that you're showing, is that there's a purpose. And, you know, when we think about the families that have—or the individuals that are lost, it's because they have not recognized their purpose and so helping them gain a purpose. So what I would like to challenge all of you to do is to rethink your testimony and also give us more details about how this...we can explain this more in terms of the curriculum that you're develop, the models that you're developing. It's nice to know that there's evaluation processes involved. I think we always want to know what's effective and to, you know, if sharing that

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curriculum is appropriate, then please share that. If there are ways that we can challenge the state—all the states, and also the federal government—to come—give us a definition of how they would define a healthy lifestyle within our indigenous communities. And I think that you have demonstrated that that is what you're doing, but I don't think our state or federal governments have really defined that and what that truly means and that, I think the other part of that, is also challenging our state and federal governments to define colonization, their role in the colonization process, and their role in the decolonization process so that we—and to recognize that there is this colonization induced stress disorder that is affecting, you know, individually and our communities collectively. So I want to thank you and I'm not going to really ask questions. They said that they were scared that I was going to ask questions [CHUCKLES] but that's my challenge to you, is to submit more detail and challenge, you know, what it means to be healthy within our tribal communities. Thank you.

*Valerie Davidson:*

If there are no other questions we want to again say [speaking NATIVE LANGUAGE @ 1:14:00\_1008] for coming and testifying today. I know that travel in Alaska is always challenging and it sounds like it was especially challenging for you, Evon, so we really appreciate your taking the time to come. I know that you were scheduled to do this work that you were talking about today and were able to break away to be able to be with us and we appreciate that. Mary and Bobbi, thank you also for coming. I know that this work is really, really hard work and I think sometimes when we're talking about statistics and we're sharing our experience and shar—being asked to share the experiences of others, it can be really challenging to do that in a way that honors their experience, but at the same time honors our collective experience as well, and I think this panel really did an amazing job, all three of you did an amazing job of showcasing that there are amazing programs in Alaska that we know are working. It sounds like some of them have been around long enough to be statistically valid and have enough of—to have a large enough population to do that, but we also I think need to recognize that there are other programs that—from our smaller communities—that are never going to be able to meet those statistical requirements

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and we need to make sure that no matter where people live, when we're talking about Alaskan Native children or American Indian people who are fortunate enough to be able to live in their home communities and their home regions, that we have to respect who they are as people, who they've always been as people and as we heard when we were traveling in Bethel and Napaskiak and Emmonak, we heard from people who said, "When I walk through a door for services, I shouldn't have to change who I am as a person for you to be able to see who I am and for you to help me to heal and help me to do what's right for my family. You should be able to meet me where I am," and I think the work that all of you are doing meets people where they are and honors and respects who they are as people and who their families are and the regions that they come from, the communities that they come from, and honors the respect and tradition of the tribes that you're serving, so with that, [speaking NATIVE LANGUAGE @ 1:16:36\_1008]. Thank you all so very much. Evon?

*Evon Peter:*

I wasn't sure if the other ladies actually wanted us to respond now or if we have time to respond or not? All right, I'll be quick. So I'll just say that my work began because I saw the need for leadership among our people. I saw the need for Alaskan Native leaders who were not afraid to speak truth to the situation and circumstances that we are facing.

As a young chief, I was told many times within the Alaskan Native community as well as outside of it, to be careful with what I say about what it is that their our people are facing and about the dynamics that are impacting our people, and then as a young chief I experienced it firsthand when I had many state officials tell me they were going to cut the little bit of funding that creates the three months of jobs that we have in my village if I wouldn't stop pushing on an injustice that the state was carrying out upon us that was actually illegal under federal law. And they told me that I didn't have the resources or time or capacity to push a class action lawsuit against the state in order to make the changes. It was about not getting paid Davis Bacon wages under federal funding, and it turns out they were right, I didn't have the resources, time or capacity and I was too

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young to understand how to amass that in order to push back on that. And so because of these many circumstances that I realized that our people were facing, I realized that we need more than just one leader who's willing to take a stand, we need all of our leaders willing to take a stand on the issues that we are too—being silent about, including the violence or the abuses that were occurring. And that was the beginning of my work to help build a generation of young leader—Alaska Native leaders—who had a strong understanding of their identity, had an understanding of the history of colonization and the injustices and how they're still being perpetuated to this day and why we need to make a stand to confront that so that our future generations don't have to continue to suffer as we suffer today under circumstances that are unjust and inequitable in our own homeland.

And what I found out was that at the beginning of developing leaders, they have to heal. At—from the first time that I started to do the leadership work, the first thing would happen is all the young people would just break down in tears sharing the experiences that they had went through in their life, the traumas, the hardships, and it was the first time that most of them had had a chance to let it off their chest and share it and release it and to seek comfort in community and relationship with others who had experienced similar to them. And that was how my work began to fall into this area of healing and wellness and prevention. Now, I see that as a path, a pathway, you know, to leadership, to wellbeing, help people to heal. So that's identity and destiny, is the way I couch it as far as curriculum, it's understanding the impacts of assimilation and assimilation policies on our people, how that impacted our families, communities, and then also understanding the history of injustice that limited our self-determination as a people, our ability to have control over our own destiny, from my grandfather who had—was not a citizen, had no rights, essentially, under state and federal system, to me, who's still trying to fight to be able to hunt and fish the way my grandfather taught me how to and not go to jail for it.

And so these are very real issues and challenges that are stresses on our people while we're trying to help our people

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to heal from these situations that have been being shared, and so that's why I said earlier, it's a long term vision and approach about healing, developing leadership capacity, developing self-determination, become educated about what's really happening to our people and among our lands and then challenging those injustices and violences that— an inequalities that continue to exist all the way from the family, community, state, to federal level. And I really believe that indigenous peoples have some of the key knowledge and understanding to help healing at a state and federal level because it's not like they can really manage their budgets that well, either, if any of you have been following the federal budget process or the trajectory of our economy. And so I really feel that as indigenous peoples, we have a tremendous amount to offer and if there would be that true partnership between the state and federal government and our people and our leaders, that we could really begin to bring about some much needed transformation, not only among our people, but as I mentioned earlier, provide a demonstration to the world on how people can really transform and move through a very challenging moment that we're in as humanity on a global scale. Thank you.

*Joanne Shenandoah:* Very well said, thank you.

[APPLAUSE]