

*Equine-Assisted Gang
Preventions for North American
Indian Horse Cultures*



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There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man.

(Variously attributed to Lord Palmerston ca. 1890, Winston Churchill, Will Rogers, and others.)

Gangs are a relatively recent phenomenon on American Indian (AI) reservations, emerging in the 1990s, with numbers and associated problems growing rapidly since then (Grant & Feimer, 2007; Major, Egley, Howell, Mendenhall, & Strong, 2004; Feng, Davis, McCord, & Rousell, 2012). AI gangs respond to developmental needs of marginalized adolescents by emphasizing cultural identity, asserting cultural power (Armstrong, Bluehouse, Dennison, Mason, Mendenhall, Wall, & Zion, 2002; Bell & Lim, 2005; Grant & Feimer, 2007; Henderson, Kunitz, & Levy, 1999; Mendenhall & Armstrong, n.d.) and personal honor (Totten, 2009). They also defend against the negative effects of discrimination (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Chen, & Stubben, 2002) and provide a sense of protection and social support through fictive kin relations (e.g., “cousin-brothers,” Henderson et al., 1999, p. 248; see also Hailer & Hart, 1999). But gangs have a dark side, contributing to substance abuse (Major et al., 2004), delinquent behaviors, (Henderson et al., 1999; Whitbeck et al., 2002), and violence (Totten, 2009).

As organized gangs have migrated from cities to reservations (Joseph & Taylor, 2003; Major et al., 2004), minor gang-related delinquency such as “tagging,” partying, and fighting is being supplanted with serious criminal activity and drug trafficking (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008; Feng et al., 2012; Major et al., 2004). These emerging, well-organized criminal gangs are placing serious strains on tribal criminal justice systems (Pridemore, 2004); and membership recruitment is outpacing prevention efforts (Totten, 2008). Conventional prevention efforts aimed at suppression and redirection are not working well (Totten, 2008; Pridemore, 2004).

AI gang recruitment continues to be extremely successful, particularly on large reservations. In the 2000 Office of Juvenile Justice report on AI gangs (Major et al., 2004), 23% of the surveyed AI communities indicated they had active youth gangs in their communities. This number has certainly increased during the ensuing decade. For example, current data from our eight-year panel study of 746 Indigenous adolescents on four U.S. reservations and four Canadian First Nation reserves (see Whitbeck, Yu, Johnson, Hoyt, & Walls, 2008, for study details) indicate that over the course of the study, more than three-fourths of the adolescents (77.5% boys; 79.3% girls) knew older adolescents who were gang members; and about half had friends (51.9% girls; 49.4% boys) or relatives (44.3% boys; 49.3% girls) who were gang members. During the eight years of the study, nearly half of the adolescent boys (46.4%) and one-third of the girls (34.3%) had been approached to join a gang.

We believe that gangs are succeeding because of what they offer in contrast to conventional prosocial alternatives. Gang activities are often more interesting and certainly more exciting than most conventional activity-oriented programs. Recognizable “colors” set gang members apart from their peers and contribute to a sense of pride and belonging. Gangs also provide protection and prestige to adolescents who are consistently and overtly exposed to

discrimination when off the reservation (Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, & Adams, 2004). We have shown elsewhere that discrimination temporally precedes aggression among Indigenous youth (AI and Canadian First Nation), and that the effects of discrimination on aggression operate through anger (Sittner Hartshorn, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2012). Gang affiliation is a natural response to anger engendered by discrimination.

We can learn from AI gangs' successes to provide prosocial alternatives. Great Plains horse cultures encompass all of the elements to address the adolescent developmental needs that are promoting the proliferation of gangs. These horse cultures have strong historic traditions of Warrior Societies that provided protection for encampments and participated in hunts, trading, and raiding (Hamalainen, 2003; Roe, 1974). (Indeed, prison gangs already have co-opted the "Warrior Society" name for gang membership (Arizona Department of Corrections, 2013; Griffen & Hepburn, 2006)). With their introduction in the 1700s, horses came to dominate the activities of men and women. They expanded migration boundaries to follow the buffalo herds. They revolutionized hunting methods and strategies for making war (Roe, 1974). Horses became a symbol of wealth and prestige for men and their families. Tribal leaders and families rich in horses were expected to share them by giving them away or lending them to the less fortunate for hunts or when camps were moved (Hamalainen, 2003). Songs and ceremonial dances were made about horses, and they became part of the cultures' spiritual traditions (Jenkins & Wapp, 1976; Penney & Stouffer, 1986).



Contemporary Great Plains horse cultures have retained their ties to their lands and their love and respect of horses. Many of the horse songs, ceremonies, and dances have been preserved. Horses symbolize a time when the nations were at the pinnacle of power and independence. Moreover, horses are abundant on contemporary reservations as are experienced, highly-competent horse men and women. All of these factors coalesce to make equine-assisted gang prevention programs an ideal cultural fit.

Empirical Foundations for Equine-Assisted Gang Preventions

Grassroots equine programs have been proliferating across Great Plains reservations. They range from the adaptation of equine-assisted therapy techniques; to teaching horsemanship; to single "rides" that emphasize cultural pride, dignity, and sobriety (Whitbeck, Walls, & Welch, 2012). Although there is widespread popular support for these programs and a lot of local publicity, there has never been a randomly-controlled trial that demonstrates their efficacy. A small number of recent studies based on non-AI samples, however, offer some support for positive mental health outcomes. Based on a very small sample ($n = 29$), Bachi and colleagues (2012) showed "trends" indicating positive effects of equine-facilitated psychotherapy on adolescents' self-image, self-control, trust, and general life satisfaction. McDonald and Cappel (2003) reported positive effects for self-efficacy and self-esteem for seven adolescents who participated in a 14-week 4-H horsemanship program. In a similar non-controlled pilot study, she and her colleague reported improvement in depressive symptoms among ten adolescents who

participated in a seven-week horsemanship program (Bowers & McDonald, 2001). In a study of 28 adolescents with learning disabilities who were part of an alternative school program, Ewing and colleagues (2007) found no significant improvement on measures of self-esteem, empathy, internal locus of control, depressive symptoms, or loneliness. In yet another non-controlled study, Kaiser, Spence, Lavergne, and Vanden Bosch (2004) reported a reduction in scores on the Children's Anger Inventory after a five-day therapeutic riding day camp. Based on a very mixed sample (ages 23 – 70) of adult participants (n = 31) in a four-day residential treatment program, Klontz and colleagues (2007) reported follow-up data from 28 hours of equine-assisted group therapy at three time-points. They found significant positive post-test effects for scores on the Brief Symptoms Inventory Global Severity Index but no significant effects at six-month follow-up. Scores on the Personal Orientation Inventory also significantly improved and were maintained at six months. Shultz and associates (2007) reported significant improvement in scores on the Children's Global Assessment of Functioning among 63 children who had been exposed to family violence after they had participated in an average number of 19 equine-assisted therapy sessions. In a rare controlled study, Trotter and colleagues (2008) reported significant improvement among a non-random sample of 3rd - 8th grade school children who participated in a 12-week equine-assisted group therapy program. Compared to children in a conventional group therapy program (n = 38), those in the equine-assisted program (n = 126) showed reductions in externalizing and hyperactivity, and improved scores on stress and self-esteem measures.

All of these studies are seriously flawed. The samples are non-random and extremely small, most lack control groups, and none has randomized assignment of treatment and control conditions. Moreover, the statistical analyses are rudimentary, and small samples sizes limit statistical power and prohibit meaningful multivariate analyses. The fall-back method has been qualitative feedback from participants that is essentially testimonials about the approach (Bizub, Joy, & Davidson, 2003; Burgon, 2003; Roberts, Bradberry, & Williams, 2004; Yorke, Adams, & Coady, 2008).

These methodological weaknesses are due to inherent challenges to small, labor-intensive interventions, but they can be overcome with systematic research approaches. Sample sizes necessarily will be small because of the modality, but designs that accrue subjects across time (Brown, Wyman, Gaa, & Pena, 2006) and small sample analytic approaches can address these challenges (Allen, Mohatt, Fok, & Henry, 2009; Hoyle, 1999; see also presentations at the Advancing Science with Culturally Distinct Communities: Improving Small Sample Methods for Establishing an Evidence Base in Health Disparities Research, Fairbanks, AK, August, 2011). As equine programs continue to proliferate, there is a critical need for rigorous randomized controlled trials.

The lack of uniformity in equine programs further complicates the goal of empirical evaluations. There are at least three recognized equine traditions: equine-assisted psychotherapy, therapeutic riding, and hippotherapy (see Bachi et al., 2012). Many AI equine programs probably are best characterized as therapeutic riding. Although they may have therapeutic intentions, they primarily teach horsemanship skills and care of horses. These riding programs usually link horsemanship to cultural traditions and often have a focus such as sobriety or cultural identity, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (e.g., The Four Generations Ride from Standing Rock Reservation to Wounded Knee has been ongoing annually since 1985; see Whitbeck,

Walls, & Welch, 2012). We are aware of only one AI hippotherapy program that focuses on autistic children (Native American Advocacy Program, 2013).

There are a wide variety of grassroots AI equine programs that offer some form of equine-assisted therapy. Typically, these programs are based on equine-assisted therapy training and certification programs such as the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA); the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH, formerly the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA)); and the PATH-affiliated Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association. Both of our examples of equine-assisted prevention programs are based on EAGALA training, and the program facilitators were EAGALA certified.

Two Examples of Great Plains Horse Culture Equine-Assisted Preventions

The following programs are examples of equine-assisted programs for AI adolescents that could be adapted for gang preventions. The first was developed and piloted as an adolescent gang/substance use prevention; the second is an ongoing substance abuse treatment program for adolescents and adults.

Shonga Ska: Sacred Horse Society

During 2004 – 2006, our research team worked with the Omaha Tribe to develop and pilot the *Shonga Ska: Sacred Horse Society* gang/substance abuse prevention program (National Institute of Drug Abuse, DA016654). This program is property the Omaha Tribe. It is based on one of the most respected and earliest documented horse cultures of the Great Plains (Reinhard, 2002). The cultural content was developed via focus groups and interviews with tribal elders who told us about described the importance of horses in Omaha culture.

The elders laid the historical foundations for the prevention program and agreed to participate in it through visits and presentations to the children. The following quotes are examples of what the elders brought to the program. All of the elders quoted signed consent forms indicating their words could be used to guide the program development and subsequent teachings. They were reimbursed for their consultation. In focus groups and personal interviews, the elders talked about the history and role of horses in Omaha culture:

Before the coming of the horse, the warriors, the men folks were too busy hunting buffalo on foot, and that took a lot of time, because you couldn't travel as fast as you can on horseback. So when the horse came, they got their chores done. Like killing the buffalo...packing the buffalo back to the camp, wherever it might be. And that eliminated a lot of time. And it got to the point where your duties were caught up, your chores were caught up. You had enough buffalo stored, you had enough food stored for the coming winter months. And the horse gave you that time. And you got all that done, then you had time. People began to dress up, they dressed the horse up, combed the horse out...the finest animals that they could acquire. The ladies, the woman folks, were horse people, too. They dressed the horses up in a style that they wanted and...they went to visit, so they had time to do all this, and the horse was the instigator of the attention that they

had. And so people began to accept the horse as part of the family. So every man, child, women, were introduced to the horse. And they communicated with the horse when the horse was now a family member. (Male Omaha Elder)

The elders also told us about things that horses could teach the adolescents, such as positive relationships:

They say that the horse is a teacher. If you can take care of this horse, you can equally look up to your relatives, take care of your relatives. So it's like the horse will teach you that. The horse will also teach you understanding between the horse and the human. (Male Omaha Elder)

Horses also teach listening skills, spirituality, and trust. As one male Omaha elder pointed out: "You can tell when a horse is listening. They calm down and they listen to you talk. Well, kids will learn that." Another male elder told us:

A horse has other, mysterious knowledge. They know where there are certain areas that they don't want to go. They're not going to go there...but there's something there...and they'll keep from that area because that's a danger spot. White people don't believe in spirits, but we Indians do. We know where those spots are, and the horse knows that. And so, the more you understand the horse... sometimes you rely on the horse to get you home. And the horse can get you home without any guidance at all. Let him go. Turn loose. Yeah, he'll get you there. But that's what kind of communication system that we have with these animals. Part of us, part of the family. (Male Omaha Elder)

A male elder mentioned that caring for horses will teach the children responsibility and empathy: "One thing you have to do the horse eats, sleeps. Everyday starting in the morning, you have to learn how to learn how to handle that. Water them, feed them, brush them down, check meals, the horse meals." Another male elder spoke eloquently regarding the comfort and healing offered in the human-horse relationship:

Well, to begin with, my experience with horses was not only physical but it also helped take your immediate problems, your personal problems, away from whatever it is, and you focused your attention on the horse. And you begin to care for the horse. Water, feed, combing the horse, talking to the horse...telling your problems to the horse. And the horse is taking the problems that you had with yourself and helping you solve life's problems.

Finally, the elders defined what the goals of a positive "Warrior Society" should be:

Warriors make commitments. In the days gone by, they ate last. They took care of their elders and their children first. And that's the teaching that we have, as Indian people. The honor, caring, of our people is first, last, and always. That's our teaching. (Male Omaha Elder)

We also learned about traditional horse songs from the elders. One male elder described the importance of preserving them for future generations: "I'm trying to tell everybody that, the

songs, we are losing them.” In response, we contracted with the *Omaha Singers* to produce a compact disc of traditional Omaha horse songs entitled *Shonga Ska* (2005). The play list includes 11 traditional songs such as *I am going head-on into the enemy with my horse*; *The enemy has seen the speed of my horse*; and *Looking Bear, I am riding on my horse, look upon me*. The horse songs were played by the *Omaha Singers* as part of the prevention program, discussed with the children, and each child received a copy of the compact disc.

Curriculum Components & Facilitation

The *Shonga Ska* curriculum was eight weeks long, with five half-day sessions each week. The elders told us we must have separate programs for boys and girls, and that we must have male and female facilitators and horse professionals. During the process of developing the program components, eight facilitators went through EAGALA Level 1 certification, and all facilitators received CPR training and training in work with human subjects.

The weekly program included regular activities. For example, each week began with a talking circle to process the weekend and to review program activities and learning. After a full circle was completed, the children were given time for informal discussion and interaction. Also, the children developed weekly “mind maps” (White Bison, Inc.), where they were given an Omaha word or words that captured the weekly theme. Each participant then provided additional words or definitions to elaborate the theme. They first worked together as a group to “brain storm” words associated with the weekly theme, then they would work alone (interacting with others) to create that week’s mind map page in their scrapbook. The participants also spent time each week writing a daily journal chronicling their likes and dislikes about the daily programs. Each daily session began and ended with a prayer. Prayer is extremely important in Omaha culture, and this practice was strongly encouraged by elders and our community advisors. The facilitators tried to involve the adolescents as much as possible to understand the meaning of prayer and how to pray according to Omaha traditions. At the end of each week, a small ceremony was performed to empower the adolescents as they left for the weekend.

Each week included lessons and exercises that involved working with horses. The horse activities were a combination of EAGALA-based therapeutic exercises and horsemanship training designed to challenge the youth and help them to learn more about themselves. Each day ended with grooming and caring for their horse. The activities with horses were designed to allow the children to practice elements of the weekly themes. There follows a brief description of the weekly activities based on our final report to the Omaha Tribe (Mallory & Whitbeck, 2006). For the complete curriculum contact the Omaha Tribe.

Week 1: Relationships, Caring, Bonding and Respect

The objectives for this week were to teach respect for others and relationship-building. Along with relationship-building activities and activities exploring family, kinship, and clans, the children were taught Omaha words (e.g., *respect*, *different*, *alike*) that represented the weekly theme. The



horse activities included choosing, naming, haltering, and grooming a horse. These activities served to begin a relationship between the child and his or her horse. The facilitators gave halters to each child and allowed him or her to select a horse and place the halter on the animal. Through this exercise, the children began to develop an awareness of their nonverbal communication and to gain confidence in approaching and handling such a large animal.

Week 2: Communication Skills

This week's objectives were to teach verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Activities focused on family relationships and Omaha words for family members (e.g., *grandfather, grandmother, mother, father*). The horse activity this week was longeing. Longeing was used to promote communication, relationship-building and assertiveness (Kersten & Thomas, 2004). In this exercise, the participant has a longe line that is tied to the horse. The participant then uses the line to exercise the horse. The participant stays in one place as the horse trots in a circle around the individual. The wider the circle, the more exercise and work for the horse and the participant. The facilitators demonstrated the activity and then asked the children to do the same. This exercise serves to continue relationship-building between horse and child, provide insight into communicating with the animal, and build confidence.

Week 3: Establishing Social Support in the Community/Responsibility to Self, Family, Tribe and Community

The objectives for this week involved identifying sources of social support and positive role models in the community. The exercises were designed to help the children identify whom they can go to for help and guidance, and how to build a positive support system. The Omaha words for the week named potential sources of community support such as *doctor, police, teacher, pastor, and elder*. The horse activity for the week was the EAGALA-based egg relays. The facilitator set up a large area to complete this exercise. The children were divided into two teams. Each team had a horse, halter, lead rope, tablespoon, and eggs. Obstacles were placed in the path of the horses. With one hand, the children led the horse, carrying the egg in the tablespoon in the other hand. If the egg dropped, the team member must start over. Afterward, the facilitators led a discussion about their feelings during the exercise, who dropped eggs, how they handled it, how the group responded, and how it felt to have the team members counting on them (Kersten & Thomas, 1997). This week, the children were allowed to ride with participants, leading one another's horses around the circle.

Week 4: Acceptance of Cultural Identity/Coping with Historical Loss

This was Omaha history week. An elder and singers were present to conduct a small handgame for the adolescents. The elder and singers translated traditional horse songs and led a discussion on the importance of these songs to the Omaha people and their culture. The elder told the children the history of the handgame and about other Omaha games that are no longer played. The boys' and girls' classes were combined, and the boys competed against the girls in the handgame. In a second round, the teams were randomly selected.

The *Omaha Singers* attended a second separate session during week four and continued the discussion about the importance of music and song to the Omaha Culture. They also discussed

how to care for a drum and how to begin traditional singing if a child wished to do so. The *Omaha Singers* gave each of the adolescents a compact disc of traditional horse songs that was created especially for the Shonga Ska program .

The horse activity for this week was a trail ride. Again, the boys' and girls' classes were combined because of the length of the activity. The trail ride was a time for the adolescents to enjoy riding and to learn about and respect their community. They rode through a large reservation park and, as they rode, the children heard stories about Omaha history and the historical importance of horses.

Week 5: Anger Management

The Omaha words this week were *anger, cry, relax, and walk away*. One of the week's anger management activities was to mind map the theme: *Things that make me mad*. This was a scrapbook activity put together by the adolescents. They first worked as a group, in which they listed what makes them mad. They then began a second map of *Things that make me really mad*.

The horse activity was the EAGALA-based "Show Me," which is a role play between the children and the horses. During this exercise, the adolescents were in the pen with one or two horses. Two of the adolescents were to role play loud verbal anger, and the other adolescents observed the horses. The facilitators and the adolescents then processed:

- a. How did the horses act?
- b. Did the horses want to be near you when you were angry?
- c. What do you think the horses were feeling?

This week also included "horse time," or time for the children adolescents to be alone with their horse. They were each given time to walk with their horse outside of the round pen and asked to talk to their horse about things that bothered them and things they would like to see change. The facilitators provided examples on how people communicate with their animals and talked about the spirituality of the Omaha people.



Week 6: Refusal Skills and Tobacco Use

This week focused on substance abuse and refusal skills. The Omaha words for the week were *no, stop, healthy, clean, mind, and body*. Activities included a mind map of *Reasons to refuse to use*, and role plays about culturally-acceptable ways to say "no." One session included "Drug Jeopardy," a substance use informational game. The adolescents also learned about the proper use of tobacco according to Omaha culture. In early times, the sacred use of tobacco was a part of everyday Omaha life. Tobacco was put down on the ground for crops, offered when asking for strength for a feat to be accomplished, and to pray. It was also used to smoke the sacred pipe for spiritual purposes. The class was taken to a large reservation park where boys and girls were given separate instructions about meanings behind the use of tobacco and their

responsibilities as Omaha people. The week's horse activity included riding time and time spent grooming and feeding their horses.

Week 7: Problem Solving and Identifying Options

This week's mind map theme was *Problem-solving skills*. The children learned and practiced the "STEPS" problem-solving method:

Stop and identify the problem,

Think about your role in the problem,

Explore your feelings and values,

Picture your choices or alternatives, and

Step up and do the right thing.

As a group problem-solving activity, the children learned how to construct a tipi. Horse activities included EAGALA-based "Temptation Alley," where the children must lead their horse through an obstacle course made up of items very tempting for the horse. A second EAGALA-based activity, "Appendages," linked three children as left arm, right arm, and brain. The "arms" were not allowed to act without instructions from the "brain." The linked children then had to halter a horse. There also was riding time and time spent grooming and feeding.

Week 8: Self Esteem

This week began with a mind map of *self-esteem*. The second day, the children discussed and identified role models (e.g., Point out community members who are role models; To whom are you a role model? How do you become a role model?) They also participated in self-esteem building activity exercises *My Qualities* and creating a *Me* collage. The horse activity was a ride through the community. Each of the horses was saddled, and the adolescents chose who would ride and who would lead. The horses were painted for this exercise. The final day of this final week of the program ended with a closing prayer and ceremony.

Graduation

The graduation ceremony was a community-wide event. The graduates were honored at a community feast and were presented graduation certificates and black jackets with the Shonga Ska logo (Shonga Ska and a white horse silhouette on the back). During the feast, community leaders who had contributed to the development of the program were acknowledged and honored. Blankets were given to the elders who participated in the program and to members of the drum group that created the Shonga Ska compact disc. The Tribal Chairwoman was given a shawl and honored for her support of the program. Many individuals asked for time to address those in attendance and expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the program. The main focus of these comments was to acknowledge the children. At the 202nd annual Umo^{ho} Tribal

Pow Wow held August 10th through 13th, 2006, the pow wow committee set aside time during the Friday night evening events to recognize the participants in the Shonga Ska program.

The Seven Directions Equine-Assisted Therapy Program for Adolescents with Substance Use Disorders

The Seven Directions Equine model was developed by co-author Ed Parsells, Certified Substance Abuse Counselor and current Director of Lakota C.A.R.E., a faith-based substance abuse program on the Rosebud reservation. Parsells was the Director of Piya Mani Otipi (PMO) for nine years. PMO is an equine-assisted program for adolescents operated by the Rosebud Sioux tribe's Alcohol and drug Treatment program. While employed by PMO, Parsells was trained and credentialed through the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) and developed the PMO model for Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP).

The Seven Directions model is organized around a foundation of the Seven Lakota Sacred Directions, Seven Lakota Values, and Seven Powers. The seven directions are East, South, West, North, Above, Below, and Within. The seven Lakota values are: 1) Wisdom – Wok sape, 2) Generosity – Wa canteognaka, 3) Courage – Wa ohitika, 4) Fortitude – Wacintanka, 5) Humility – Wo wahuala, 6) Gratitude – Wopila, and 7) Respect – Wa Ohola. The seven powers are: 1) Spirituality – Conscience and values; 2) Emotions – Emotional compulsion; 3) Physical – the body; 4) Mental – Cognition, memory, beliefs; 5) Spirit – spirit relationships, self with the Creator; 6) Social – Interpersonal relationships; and 7) Self – Self-valuation, self-appraisal, relationship with self.

The Seven Directions Equine Model (SDEM) is organized into eight weekly sessions, each about two hours long, facilitated by a qualified counselor and a highly-skilled horse professional. Each session begins with a group prayer led by staff or a client acknowledging the Creator's presence and seeking the Creator's help in the session. Each session ends with the clients feeding the horses as a way of saying "thank you" for their friendship, communication and participation. The following is a brief description of the weekly activities based on the Seven Directions program manual.

Week 1: Orientation, Seven Directions, Lakota Values and Power, and an overview of Equine Therapy

The first session is essentially didactic, introducing the participants to horses, safety, and the Lakota horse culture. It provides the history of horses in North America via a video *America's Lost Mustangs*. It also reviews the introduction of horses into Lakota society and their centrality in Lakota culture as a sacred gift from the Creator.

The central themes for Week 1 are the human-horse relationship, understanding the world view of the horse, and establishing trust. This session establishes the centrality of the horse-human bond that will be the basis for the subsequent sessions:



The bond between horse and human is ancient and strong. Horses are mental, emotional, and spiritual beings like us; if we are sensitive to them, they will help us become more sensitive to ourselves and aware of the Creator.

It is no wonder horses were seen as sacred, a gift from the Creator. The name Sunka-Dog, Wakan-Sacred, sacred dog denotes the horse as a gift from the Creator, greater than the former beast of burden, the dog. Sunka Wakan teaches us the ways of the Creator by observing His creation. The Seven Directions model is rich in symbolism and metaphor, teaching spiritual ways and truth. The clients symbolize the horse, the facilitator symbolizes the Creator. The Creator has a plan and purpose for us. The Creator is training us to fulfill our purpose. (Lakota CARE Manual, p. 26)

Week 2: Woksape: Wisdom

Wisdom is the value placed in the East, the direction symbolized by the rising sun, light overpowering darkness, knowledge overpowering ignorance, newness of life, the springs of life-transforming power to regenerate life, and birth in the life cycle.

Intelligence allows us to learn from our mistakes. Wisdom allows us to learn from others' mistakes as lessons are passed from each generation. (Lakota CARE Manual, p. 23)

This session is called "Catch and Halter." The unique aspect is that the halter is spiritual, and the lead rope is spiritual. The goal is to earn the horses' *Respect* then *Trust* in the round pen. Respect and trust is accomplished by asserting and releasing pressure at key moments. Pressure is applied by sound and motion. Release is being still. Most horses learn this within five minutes. It is an innate characteristic of natural horse behavior. Once respect and trust are established, the horse surrenders to the leadership of the participant. The result is that the horse will instinctively seek to follow the participant around the round pen. The participant pretends to be leading the horse as though connected with a halter and lead rope. The halter and lead rope are literally spiritual. We instruct the participant to do a figure eight in the round pen for all to see to demonstrate the spiritual connection.

The exercise is conducted in a round pen with a horse best suited for this exercise. Most horses will respond favorably in this exercise, but some fulfill the role more precisely and quickly. Variations on the exercise include: 1) A staff member may conduct the exercise as a demonstration; 2) A client may perform the task with a staff member standing directly behind him or her to ensure the activity is accomplished properly; and 3) A client may perform the task alone in the round pen, usually this is someone already experienced with horses. If a client is to conduct the activity alone, a staff member will provide the participant with detailed instructions. The client must demonstrate they understand all



aspects of the activity to complete it alone in the round pen. The easier it is for the client, the more profound the lesson seems. When the horse resists or takes a while to fulfill the role, this is used to show how some resist the Creator and are slower to accept the Creator's will. The metaphoric lessons are: the participant plays the role of the Creator; the horse plays the role of an independent-thinking client; the round pen is life; the Creator wants to be the leader and has a plan; the Creator only uses pressure-consequences and releases inner peace to demonstrate His leadership; when we learn the lesson of respect and trust for the Creator, we have a dynamic relationship with the Creator, and He leads us based on what is best. Only He knows what is best for us, our purpose will be fulfilled, and inner peace is obtained by allowing the Creator to lead us.

Week 4: WoOhitika: Courage/Bravery

Courage is gained by recognizing, facing, and overcoming fear. Fear is generated by threats, the unknown, or alienation. When an external force threatens to overwhelm our wellbeing or safety we feel fear. When we are faced with situations that create uncertainty and we are unable to see a clear outcome we feel fear. When our support is taken or threatened we feel fear. Fear is a healthy emotion that motivates us to action. Our natural response is fight or flight. When we choose to escape rather than face our fears we may act cowardly. Drugs and alcohol are a powerful medication for fear. They numb our feelings reducing our fear. This creates an immediate but artificial remedy that retards the natural mental and emotional processes habituating a tendency to escape rather than face fear. The word Ohitika means warrior. WoOhitika describes the character quality that empowers a warrior to be successful. We intuitively fear death as a survival mechanism. The warrior is able to face this fear and not allow it to prevent the task of defending the people. This facing our fears and constructively working through them is WoOhitika. Not allowing fear to prevent us from accomplishing our goals is WoOhitika. (Lakota CARE Manual, p.25)

The horse activity in this session is very straight forward. Three adolescents are put in the pen with their three horses and told to halter their horse and lead it to the gate. No further instructions are given. The horses are likely to be playful, uncooperative, and to bunch and run all around the corral. Such large animals running about may be intimidating for the adolescents. The group discussion after the activity focuses on thoughts and feelings about the experience, other situations in which the adolescents may have been afraid, their definitions of courage, and how courage is important in their lives.

Week 5: Wacintaka: Fortitude

The Lakota word for fortitude is Wacintanka. Wacin means a want or desire for something. Tanka denotes a superlative. The word Wacintanka literally means "I want this more than anything." This is the quality of character that allows a person to keep a commitment. It is resiliency with a purpose and goal. It is strong enough to bend without breaking. Wacintanka is a character quality of mental, emotional, and spiritual strength. When a Lakota takes a vow, a

commitment is made. Anything that detracts or interferes with the goal of the commitment will be overcome with Wacintanka. Temptations to abandon the commitment come in many forms and are to be recognized and overcome. (Lakota CARE Manual, p 23)

This session employs the EAGALA-based exercise “Temptation Alley” briefly described previously in session 7 of Shonga Ska. Here, the adolescents must lead a horse through an obstacle course along which various “horse temptations,” such as hurdles and hay and oats placed to distract the horse. It is unlikely the adolescents will be able to prevent the horse from being distracted. Afterwards, the adolescents discuss life temptations, their power and ways to deal with them.

Week 6: Wopila: Gratitude

The Lakota value is gratitude. The life power is social relationships. Gratitude is the character quality of wanting what you have and appreciating it. Wanting what you don't have creates anxiety. Wanting what you can't have creates misery. Wanting what others have creates envy and jealousy. For Lakota the highest value is placed on harmonious relationships. Smooth, mutually rewarding human relationships don't just happen. Open, honest, effective communication is a key element in fostering healthy relationships. Feeling a genuine appreciation and expressing gratitude in relationships promotes mutual respect. (Lakota CARE Manual, p. 23)

This session employs the EAGALA-based activity “Appendages,” briefly described above in Week 7 of the Shonga Ska program. Here, the exercise is used to illustrate a need for teamwork, effective communication skills and cooperation.

Week 7: Wo Wahwala: Humility

In Lakota Wo Wahwala is a term that describes character quality of serenity, peace, quiet, gentleness, tranquility yet paradoxically is the toughest and most powerful character quality. It is illustrated by “Unci” grandmother. She is frail, walks softly with deliberate steps but possesses a social and spiritual power that transcends the intellect. She can give a look of approval or disapproval that commands respect. It is also illustrated in water. Water is fluid and pliable but with consistent pressure can cut steel or carve the Grand Canyon. When poured out it seeks the lowest place. These examples illustrate Wo Wahwala. When one is internally validated externals have minimal effect. When a person is internally validated they do not need or seek approval. They promote the good in others rather than call attention to personal accomplishments. If personal accomplishments need to be recognized others will call attention to them. They are unpretentious. They seek to understand rather than be understood. This is a quality of leadership. Lakota leaders are typically the most humble people. They are not self-effacing, just humble. They know within themselves that whatever power and gifts they have come to them from the Creator and that with those gifts come much responsibility.

Humility is also the quiet acceptance of self and other people for who they are. Not everyone is skilled in every way; humility is accepting oneself and others as having the gifts the Creator provided – and using them for the good of the community. (Lakota CARE Manual, p. 26)

In this session, the adolescents are each given a halter and a lead rope and told that today they will catch and halter their horses in the pasture. They are instructed to get their horse's attention, then back away a little each time the horse moves toward them. When the horse approaches, the adolescents are instructed to stroke the horse's neck, and then gently halter the horse and lead it back to the gate. If the adolescents carefully follow the instructions, they should succeed. If they are forceful or too aggressive, they will fail. The discussion afterward focuses on humility. "The more forceful you are and the more you impose your will on a situation, the less successful you will be; the more you approach a situation with humility, with negotiation, with drawing rather than forcing, the more successful you will be." (Lakota Care Manual, p. 54)

Week 8: WaOhola: Respect

In Lakota WaOhola describes the character quality of demonstrating respect. When we are respectful we earn respect. When we show respect to the Creator our faith is increased. When we respect others they tend to respect us. When we respect ourselves we seek what is best for us. We can only figure out what is good; only the Creator knows what is best for us. Lakota culture revolves around the Creator at the center. Lakota culture is a hyper-spiritual oriented culture. Respect is not a compartmentalized virtue. Respect grows and is a product of living in balance and harmony with the Creator and creation. The Seventh Direction is within. When we consciously accept that we are eternally spiritual beings that have a temporal physical experience we begin to understand respect. Our mind is transformed through a quest for understanding our purpose. Our true purpose is discovered by faith respecting the Creator. When we discover our purpose from the Creator we are internally validated and equipped to demonstrate a higher quality of respect. This perpetual process refines itself over the life cycle. Lakota elders were respected because of this process. They continually demonstrated more and more respect for the Creator, others and themselves. Some elders refined this process to being revered because of the respectful spiritual energy that radiated from them. Traditionally Lakota children were named at birth. They earned new names as they grew. As they grew in respect, milestones of accomplishment may be marked by the elders bestowing a new name.

Ed Parsells uses his family to illustrate. He is a direct descendent of Chief Lone Horn. Lone Horn's son was named Spotted Elk as an adult. When Lone Horn died, his son inherited the position as Chief as Big Foot. Ed Parsells' great grandfather was named Uses Up His Arrows as a child, and was later as an adult named Ed Hunter. Uses Up His Arrows had a twin sister that had the childhood name Beats Her Twin. As an adult, she was named Jenny Beats. (Lakota CARE Manual, p. 27)

This exercise is a “Naming Ceremony.” Several horses are corralled. Horses, by nature, have a pecking order among themselves. This is usually displayed behaviorally. The behaviors can be pronounced when the pecking order gets challenged. Horses will rear, bite, and kick to defend a dominant position. This can occur during feeding time--the hungrier they are, the more defensive and/or aggressive they become. In this exercise, the clients are outside the corral and asked to observe the horses and pick one. After each client picks a horse, a very small amount of grain is placed in the center of the corral. The more dominant horses will compete for the food. The weaker or weakest horse may not even get any grain. The clients are asked to write concrete behavior they observed and “Name” the horse based on the behavior. The exercise ends with each participant sharing with the group the behavior and name they gave the horse they picked. They also share an experience they relate to from the horse behavior observed. A theme of bullying usually emerges.

Practical Considerations, Challenges, and Cautions

Although the two example programs share much in common, there are some important differences. Shonga Ska is lengthier and involves both EAGALA-based ground exercises and horsemanship training. Seven Directions is more spiritually-oriented, focuses only on ground exercises, and takes a more psychotherapeutic approach. However, both programs share the challenges of equine-assisted therapies and prevention programs. First, equine programs are labor-intensive and, if a stable horse infrastructure does not already exist, it may be expensive to develop and difficult to sustain. The Omaha Tribe did not have an established and sustainable horse infrastructure, and Shonga Ska did not last past the pilot (although program components are being used in other venues).

Second, equine programs, particularly horsemanship programs, carry a degree of risk for injury with the potential liability this incurs; the looser the organization, the greater the risks, and the more nebulous the liability. Organizers should be aware of and plan for safety and insurance concerns. Facilitators should be well-trained and certified for equine therapy or education, and the programs should always include a competent horse professional. We have found that on American Indian reservations, if tribal councils are enthusiastic about the approach, the tribe is often willing to insure the program.

A third challenge is start-up time. These are community-based participatory research programs that involve, at minimum, community enthusiasm and support; community participation in program development (this is especially important for the cultural history and traditional program content); and community ownership of the program if it is going to be sustained (see Whitbeck, 2006). Proper program development that involves input from elders, services providers, and tribal authorities; putting into place the horse infrastructure; hiring and certifying facilitators; developing a program manual, pretesting the program, and revising the manual will take a minimum of a year. With delays in tribal approvals, IRB human subjects reviews, and training/certifications of staff, it may well take longer.

Fourth, beware enthusiastic non-Indigenous volunteer horse people, however well-meaning. The chances of microaggressions (see Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Buceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007) with the adolescents are very great. If that is a direction you must go, be sure the volunteers are well-trained on issues of Indigenous history and historical trauma. Our

approach is always to work within the reservation community and to hire and train only Indigenous people to work with the adolescents.

Finally, select your program horses very carefully. Ed Parsells suggests a mixture of horse personalities: playful, shy, high- and low-energy. Avoid especially nervous or aggressive animals in favor of horses that are socialized and comfortable around novices and young people. Also, be aware that “gift” horses may be a way of getting rid of old, diseased, or difficult stock. Here is where you need the advice of a competent horse professional.

Summary and Conclusions

AI gangs are attempting to co-opt the Warrior Society heritage of Great Plains Cultures. The gangs provide protection, pride, and cultural identity; but the antisocial values which they project are antithetical to traditional cultural values pertaining to warriors and leaders:

Warriors make commitments. In the days gone by, they ate last. They took care of their elders and their children first. And that’s the teaching that we have, as Indian people. The honor, caring, of our people is first, last, and always. That’s our teaching. (Male Omaha Elder)

We need to protect and reclaim this heritage. One way to do this is to create prosocial “gangs” or societies in response. Equine-assisted AI gang preventions are an ideal response. Horses are naturally interesting and attractive to most adolescents, but particularly to children in Great Plains Horse cultures. They are exciting to interact with and to ride. They provide self-confidence and pride of accomplishment. They also offer nonjudgmental relationships. They are sensitive and intuitive and reflect the adolescent’s emotions. They require empathy and constant care.

Co-author Ed Parsells has years of experience with equine-assisted psychotherapy with adolescents and has often witnessed the power transformation through emotional bonding between adolescents and horses. Horses provide a natural challenge to the arrogance and egotism of gang behaviors. In his years of equine therapy experience, Parsells has watched equine therapy neutralize the false respect, haughtiness, and bullying of gang members. Horses do not respond to arrogance and coercion. He has seen the toughest reservation gang bangers reduced to whimpering when confronted with the power of horses. He also has seen the “weakest” adolescents elevated in peer status by their activities in the round pen. For example, during one activity, a gang member became enraged and gave up when the horse refused to cooperate. He swore at the horse, walked away, and began crying. The horse followed the gang member and stood near enough so that the boy began petting it. The gang member was then able to lead the horse through the activity successfully.

Beyond the therapeutic relationship with horses, prosocial equine-based youth societies could adopt aspects of gang cultures that are appealing. In Shonga Ska, we had colors--black jackets with white horse (sacred horse) logos--to set the youth apart and signify cultural pride. The stables provide a safe place to “hang out” and a sense of belonging. Potentially, there are regular activities and opportunities to be noticed and honored. Moreover, prosocial youth societies afford the opportunity to regularly connect youth with positive role models, mentors

and elders, and to learn and practice traditional values. Imagine youth “Warrior Societies,” traditionally named, made up of boys and girls proudly riding in parades, pow wow grand entries, and rodeo grand entries or finales dressed in traditional regalia or their society “colors,” with their horses ceremonially painted. These youth societies, representing traditional values such as respect for others and sobriety, would be a source of pride for the entire community, and other children would be eager to join.

Establishing and maintaining these youth societies will be labor-intensive and expensive, but AI gangs are currently costing the communities much more through vandalism, delinquency, substance abuse, and demoralization of young people. The latent consequences of these prosocial societies will be preservation of cultural traditions and language, community pride and, in the long-term, more successful children. The underlying questions are: “Will they work?” “Will they be worth the investment?” These questions can be addressed empirically through carefully-designed, randomly-controlled trials that use state-of-the-science methods for sample recruitment, randomization into treatment and control groups, and small-sample data analytic methods. Current equine-assisted efficacy research is in its earliest stages, and more rigorous randomly-controlled designs should be implemented that include cost-benefit analyses. There is always talk on reservations about bringing back cultural strengths and values. Here is an opportunity, although challenging, to make a step in this direction.

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