SPIRITUALITY & TOGETHERNESS FROM A DISTANCE

RED CIRCLE LODGE

CHALLENGES OF TREATING NATIVE YOUTH DURING COVID

• Importance of sharing in Native culture
• Cultural experiences typically require togetherness
• Youth in treatment experienced anxiety as they worried about loved ones back home or getting COVID themselves
• Staffing inconsistencies and stress among staff.
IMPORTANCE OF SHARING IN NATIVE CULTURE

- Our youth were not able to share any experiences with loved ones in person.
- Zoom calls and phone calls became the only way to connect with family members.
- Youth knew that despite reaching certain milestones, they would not be rewarded with a home visit. In order to motivate them to push forward, we encouraged them to share experiences they were having in Zoom calls and phone calls.
- Packages and letters from home helped youth feel loved and remembered.

SHARING WITH LOVED ONES

- During the worst of COVID families could not come for visits and residents could not go home for visits.
- Phone calls and Zoom calls became more important than ever. We encouraged youth to share by singing on Zoom calls and sharing cultural experiences.
CULTURAL EXPERIENCES TYPICALLY REQUIRE TOGETHERNESS

- We emphasize the connection that our youth have to spirituality and culture.
- Ways we practiced culture during COVID.

EXPRESSING MUSIC

- The drum and the flute that we heard demonstrate ways to connect with each other. With our youth population, we had to change the way we use music. Wearing masks is difficult while singing and drumming, but we still did the best we could, and our youth adjusted and adapted.
PARTICIPATING IN SWEAT LODGE

During COVID, our youth were still able to participate in sweat lodge ceremonies. We knew that many of their loved ones needed their prayers, so we emphasized how grateful they should be to be able to participate at a time when others could not. We encouraged them to pray for loved ones back home during the ceremony.

CHALLENGES OF KEEPING AWAY FROM RESERVATION ACTIVITIES

- We typically attend activities on the Paiute Reservation weekly and Pow Wows on the Paiute and Moapa Reservations.
- We did not let this stop us from activities at our youth home.
  - Continued to have smudging ceremonies morning and evening. Inside – outside.
  - Continued to have bird singing on a smaller scale at our treatment center.
  - Two-step around the drum every morning after flag ceremony.
  - Regular drumming and singing, with masks.
IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS

- Youth who are struggling with many challenges need to feel connected.
- Maintaining these types of cultural connections helps dispel anxiety, feel safe, and feel belonging.
- Example: One youth stated that bird singing reminded him of his grandfather.
  Another youth stated that he felt better after bird singing than before.

HOW TO HELP YOUTH WHO EXPERIENCED ANXIETY DURING COVID

- We avoided getting COVID at our facility all the way until November. We had strict handwashing and mask policies. Our staff were monitored for symptoms. We worked together.
- Despite these precautions, almost all our residents came down with COVID at the same time.
- We decided to tell all the girls together and all the boys together. The one resident who did not test positive was sadly left out in his own quarantine. Only staff with COVID or who’d already had COVID could work.
- We sat down around the drum and told them they all had it! They were less concerned when they were told together. They could see that no one was very sick, and they all supported each other.
STAFFING INCONSISTENCIES AND STRESS AMONG STAFF

- Youth need consistency among their caregivers.
- Staffing issues during COVID became a problem as several staff members contracted COVID and could not come to work for several weeks.
- Therapists and directors took the place of staff to maintain consistency. This actually worked to help strengthen relationships and helped youth progress in treatment.
- Our staff experienced stress as well. Our nursing department stepped in to oversee their health as well. This helped them feel more secure, which in turn helped decrease anxiety among the residents.

THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES WE STRENGTHEN OUR CONNECTIONS

- Maintain connections any way possible.
- Encourage gratitude.
- Encourage activities that help others think about others, such as the youth who prayed for others during sweats.
- Encourage staying connected with spirituality and culture through song and ceremony.
- Find ways to decrease anxiety by taking necessary precautions and sharing experiences.
- When we sacrifice together it strengthens our relationships in our home and throughout.