

**PROPOSAL**  
*Healing the Future:  
a Youth and Elder Program*

Submitted to: The W. K. Kellogg Foundation  
Battle Creek, Michigan

Submitted by: The American Indian Institute and  
Traditional Circle of  
Indian Elders and Youth  
Bozeman, Montana

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## Part I: An Inter-generational Program

### Concept Summary

*Healing the Future* is a work in progress. It is a unique program bringing the wisdom of Indian Elders to Native American children, families, and communities, passing forward powerful messages of resiliency and positive life choices. It is a collaborative effort combining the strengths of three primary sources of healing ways:

1. Elders from the four directions bring ancient cultural, traditional and spiritual wisdom.
2. Local elders and community leaders add tribal wisdom and guidance plus the long-term commitment needed to keep the healing process going long after the initial *Healing the Future* program is complete.
3. Indian and non-Indian professionals apply community mobilization and prevention/intervention skills developed through working with kids in all contexts.

*Healing the Future* is a unique inter-generational approach that brings Indian kids and their families into contact with Elders who bring cultural and spiritual wisdoms into their lives in ways that are personal, extremely powerful, and lasting.

### Background

The Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth holds an international council each year. In 1992, it convened at Janet McCloud's Sapa Dawn Center near Yelm, Washington. At that time, the Nisqually delegation told a story of urgent community need, particularly involving children and youth. The Nisqually story prompted the Circle to ask the American Indian Institute to work with the Elders council in seeking ways to enable Indian communities to reestablish and strengthen the age-old life-line connecting young Indians with their traditional cultural and spiritual leaders connecting Indian kids with the Wisdom Keepers. In response, a partnership was established involving the Council, the Institute, and the Greater Phoenix Youth-At-Risk Foundation, a nationally recognized developer of programs aimed at enlisting the resources of entire communities on behalf of children and youth. Over the next two years, *Healing the Future* was formulated based on the input of all the partners.

### Program Content and Structure

The collaboration of the Elders, the Institute, Greater Phoenix and participating Native American communities has led to the creation of a program *unlike any other* in the Indian or non-Indian worlds. Two aspects of *Healing the Future* make it unique. First, its emphasis on re-introducing traditional and spiritual aspects of Native American culture makes it an inter-generational program with spectacular power and longevity. The insights and messages that Elders from the four directions contribute significantly builds the self esteem and pride of the Indian kids who are involved. Second, because the program includes community

Financial support is needed for a total of 28 *Healing the Future* programs slated to take place during the five years from 1996 through 2000.

### Collaboration

Each *Healing the Future* program is a collaborative effort involving:

- The Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth
- Traditional and tribal leaders of the community in which the program is being run
- The American Indian Institute
- Local community foundations
- The Greater Phoenix Youth-At-Risk Foundation

In the early days of the Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth, the late Phillip Deere, a revered Elder whose love and concern for Indian Youth was uppermost, lamented the fact that his contact with youth was sporadic, whether within his youth and elder conferences or in forums at schools and universities. A program to allow that interaction to take place on a sustained basis was a dream of the Phillip Deere and many other Elders. We believe that *Healing the Future* draws upon Phillip Deere's inspiration and provides that opportunity for the first time, and as such represents a breakthrough in realizing the first priority of the Circle.

commitment and an extended follow-up period, its lessons and impacts become integral parts of participants' lives and the lives of many others in the community.

At most sites, *Healing the Future* consists of six phases:

1. Six to ten days of preparation, training, and recruitment involving community leaders, school officials, parents, and youth who have the potential for acting as resources during the course of the program.
2. Four days of intensive work involving:
  - a. traditional Native American training and re-introduction to Indian life ways and cultural traditions, directed by Elders from the Four Directions as well as local tribal Elders.
  - b. lengthy interactive discussions directed by Greater Phoenix Youth-At-Risk professionals and supported by Elders, local community leaders, volunteer mentors, and other volunteer support.
  - c. physical exercises aimed at building team work and trust, and
  - d. ropes course challenges designed to build belief in self as well as the capacity to trust other individuals and the group
3. A three-month follow-up period during which mentors remain committed to participants, meeting with them at least weekly and supporting them through all opportunities and challenges.
4. Three months after the first session, a two-day progress review session with participants and community members at which Elders take the lead in counseling and follow-up.
5. A second three-month follow-up period during which mentors remain committed to participants, meeting with them at least weekly.
6. A final two-day progress review and evaluation session at which Elders take the lead in drawing community and youth together in a renewed commitment for the future.

### ***Program Participants***

Each program involves the following groups of professionals and volunteers from the Indian community:

*Mentors* provide support for the participants. The ideal ratio is one mentor for each kid.

*Facilitators* act as trouble shooters. They are recruited from the community.

They are individual community leaders who know the young people and their families. Three to five facilitators are found to participate in the entire program.

*Project Coordinators* are recruited to guide the program for the community.

### **Commitment**

The Traditional Circle of Elders and Youth has committed to finding ways of meeting the special needs of today's Indian young people and has chosen *Healing the Future* as a primary vehicle for pursuing that commitment.

### **Comprehensiveness**

By reaching the youthful leadership of Indian communities today, *Healing the Future* reaches tomorrow's mothers and fathers the core of tomorrow's communities, building the foundations for comprehensive change in their familial, social, spiritual, political, and economic structures.

### **From a Participant Letter**

*I attended a program called Healing the Future which really made me a better person altogether. Before I attended this program I was confused with myself and my family. I didn't understand life and why I had to be hurt. I often thought of killing myself or running away.... When I got to the camp I was scared.... It was hard for me to talk about my feelings, and cry in front of my friends but in a way talking and crying made me feel a lot better, and also knowing the Elders, the staff and friends were there to support me. The next three days were hard for me, letting go of all my anger and hatred, and every night was better just knowing I was a little bit happier. By the time the course was over I grew closer to everyone who went on the trip. They were like my second family.... I no longer think of killing myself or running away. My mother and I are best friends now. I respect myself and my life. I know now there are many tests in life, and you have to be a strong person to be a better person.*

Serena Lee White  
Pima

These are local community leaders who know how to draw in the community's resources to get things done.

*Community Volunteers* are found to assist the project coordinators as a production team. They do not participate in the course work but assist in seeing that physical and logistical arrangements are made.

Mitchell Akin, Executive Director of the Greater Phoenix group, and two assistants act as trainers for the course, preparing mentors, facilitators and others for their responsibilities in the program.

Finally, added to the involvement of many representatives of the Indian community, the broader community will be involved through the work of community foundations. Professionals and community-based volunteer fund-raisers will be used to generate funds for a permanent endowment to sustain *Healing the Future* programs into the future.

*Healing the Future* makes a difference in the lives of Indian kids by bringing them in touch with their roots and thereby opening their eyes to their own identities and strengths as Indians. Only the Elders can make this difference and only such a difference can last by finding a permanent place within the hearts of the children and within structures of their communities.

### **Programs in the Four Directions**

The first two *Healing the Future* programs are in progress. One began in February 1995 and involves the Pima and Maricopa peoples of the Gila River/Ak-Chin communities in south-central Arizona. The second began on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in southeastern Montana in July 1995.

In accordance with the vision of the Traditional Circle, *Healing the Future* programs are needed throughout Indian country. Consequently, a five-year plan has been prepared by the Institute to offer *Healing the Future* in the Four Directions. (The number and location of *Healing the Future* programs to occur over five years are shown in the table to the right.)

### **Financing**

In its more than 20 years of existence, the Institute has demonstrated remarkable success in generating short-term funding for operations and programs. Further, the Institute successfully accomplished the difficult task of funding and administering the first two pilots of *Healing the Future* while maintaining its ongoing operations and other programmatic efforts at normal levels. However, the Institute anticipates a new level of commitment in offering *Healing the Future* nationwide over five years.

To successfully develop, evaluate and fine-tune *Healing the Future* through the year 2000 will require funding as shown in the budget on the next page. Beyond 2000, the Institute and Elders realize a long-term commitment is necessary to sustain *Healing the Future* indefinitely.

### **Community Based**

The success of each *Healing the Future* program depends on the intimate involvement of the community including tribal, social, economic, and traditional spiritual leaders in every phase from planning through six-month follow-up.

### **Creativity**

*Healing the Future* creatively combines ancient healing practices with modern, mainstream intervention/prevention techniques. It is a unique inter-generational program bringing the wisdom of Elders into the lives of Indian kids.

### **So What?**

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## **Request for Support**

The American Indian Institute and Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth request W.K. Kellogg Foundation support of \$1.575 million for the five-year *Healing the Future* plan. The total five-year costs for the 28 programs is \$3,272,700. Our ability to raise that amount would be greatly enhanced by a major leadership grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation which would, in turn, promote the involvement of other funding sources. Over the past three years, the Institute has contacted many funding sources and many of them would likely be energized to support the *Healing the Future* program based on substantial support by Kellogg.

## **Sustainability**

The wisdoms that Elders bring to the Indian communities participating in this program have been sustained through oral traditions for thousands of years and must continue to be sustained for thousands more. The goal of the *Healing the Future* program is to build a national network of community- foundation-based endowments adequate in size to ensure the sustainability of programs like *Healing the Future* that seek to heal Native American communities by bringing ancient wisdoms to those communities.

## **Broad Support**

Among those who are advocating support of *Healing the Future* is Wilma Mankiller, who said that the Indian youth crisis is very real, and that people are not aware either of its dimensions or its seriousness. In her opinion, the inertia regarding the problem, as well as the denial, stem from not knowing what to do about it. *Healing the Future* is the right approach according to her.