



One Size Does Not Fit All: Tailoring Victim Services for the Local Native American Population in Pennington County, South Dakota

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ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL: TAILORING VICTIM SERVICES FOR THE LOCAL NATIVE AMERICAN POPULATION IN PENNINGTON COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA

INTRODUCTION

Providing timely, responsive, high-quality victim services can interrupt a cycle of violence among a family, peer group, or community; reduce risk of future victimization; encourage continued engagement throughout the investigation/prosecution; and increase victim and community trust in the justice process. United States Attorney's Offices, law enforcement agencies, courts, and community organizations across the country are developing innovative strategies that not only reduce crime but also support victims as they cope with and recover from the trauma of violent crime.

Developed by the National Center for Victims of Crime and CNA's Center for Justice Research and Innovation, this brief is one in a series designed to highlight leading victim services efforts. The goal of the series is to provide Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) teams with insight on innovative and culturally sensitive victim services efforts, and to highlight the impact that these efforts can have on agencies and individuals. Each brief will provide an overview of a victim services organization or initiative and its successes, challenges, and lessons learned.

This brief focuses on the Victim Specialists Program within the Pennington County South Dakota Sheriff's Office (PCSO). Specifically, it highlights the Victim Specialists Program's work with Native American victims and its incorporation of culturally competent practices. We provide an overview of the PCSO's Victim Specialists Program, and highlight promising practices and lessons learned for PSN teams to consider when developing or modifying similar strategies within their districts. We also incorporate relevant literature on the topics of victimization, domestic violence, and substance abuse to provide additional context to support the need for victim services within the Native American population. Finally, we supplement the promising practices and lessons learned with best practices from the literature for providing victim services to Native American victims.

METHODOLOGY

To gather detailed information on the PCSO and its key partners' work with Native American victims, CNA worked closely with the PCSO to coordinate interviews with relevant personnel. We also requested PCSO materials related to the Victim Specialists Program to supplement our interviews. In the interviews, CNA sought information on the nature of the PCSO and its key partners' work with Native American victims, the role of cultural competency in providing victim services, and any challenges or successes the PCSO has experienced providing services to Native American victims. CNA used this information to develop the case study.



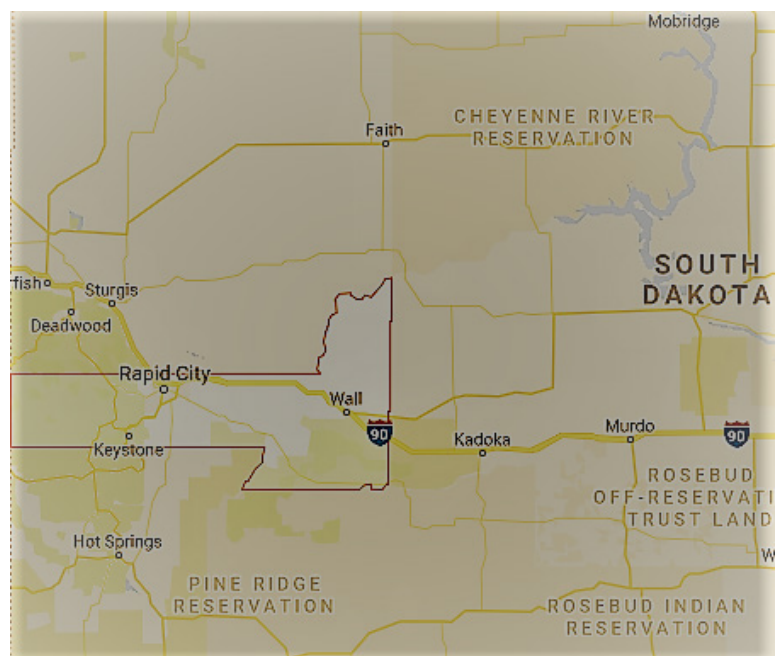
The CNA team interviewed three PCSO employees, four individuals from community-based organizations, and one crime survivor. The interviewees represented a mix of enrolled members (i.e., Native American) and non-enrolled members.¹

BACKGROUND

Pennington County

Pennington County, outlined in Figure 1, is located in the western half of South Dakota, with the western boundary of the county bordering the northeast boundary of Wyoming. The county also directly borders one of the largest American Indian Reservations, the Pine Ridge Reservation, and is close to the Cheyenne River Reservation. The Rosebud Indian Reservation is also nearby and a large percentage of victims served by PCSO are members of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. The county is approximately 2,776 square miles, and, as of 2017, had a population of 110,141. Pennington County is majority non-Indian (nearly 83 percent); the next largest demographic is Native American (9.5 percent). Rapid City is the largest city in the county.

Figure 1. Outline (red) of Pennington County, South Dakota



Source: (Google Maps)

Importantly, Pennington County includes part of the sacred Black Hills. In 1877, the Black Hills were illegally taken from the Sioux Nation by the U.S. Government.² In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the land had been taken from the Sioux Nation and ordered that the Sioux Nation be compensated for the land.³ However, the Sioux Nation has not accepted the compensation, as doing so would suggest the Sioux Nation is relinquishing its claim to the land.⁴ It is critical that victim services providers, particularly those in South Dakota, understand and acknowledge how the history of the Black Hills impacts Native people living in Pennington County.

¹ "Tribal enrollment requirements preserve the unique character and traditions of each tribe. The tribes establish membership criteria based on shared customs, traditions, language and tribal blood." <https://www.doi.gov/tribes/enrollment#:~:text=Two%20common%20requirements%20for%20membership,named%20on%20the%20base%20roll.&text=Other%20conditions%20such%20as%20tribal,with%20the%20tribe%20are%20common.>

² [https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/448/371.](https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/448/371)

³ [https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/448/371.](https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/448/371)

⁴ [https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/north_america-july-dec11-blackhills_08-23.](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/north_america-july-dec11-blackhills_08-23)



Pennington County Sheriff's Office and the Victim Specialists Program

The PCSO, led by Sheriff Kevin Thom, is located in Rapid City and serves the entire county. The PCSO shares a headquarters with the Rapid City Police Department (RPD) and has more than 400 employees spread across its four divisions: Addiction Services, Jail, Juvenile Services Center, and Law Enforcement. As of this report's publication, the law enforcement division had 173 personnel, four of whom identified as Native American.⁵

In August of 2016, the PCSO used a Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) sub grant award administered through the South Dakota Department of Public Safety to hire two full-time victim specialists, who work within the investigations division of the PCSO supporting approximately 15 investigators. A sworn PCSO captain supervises the victim specialists. Although they are hired technically by the PCSO, the victim specialists also support victim cases for the RPD investigations division, which also has about 15 detectives. The VOCA grant stipulates that the victim specialists provide services to victims of serious violent crimes. Thus, they address crimes ranging from simple assault to homicide with a range of services to victims, including the following⁶:

- Sexual assault services
- Crisis counseling
- Follow-up contacts
- Information/referrals
- Criminal justice support (e.g., providing case update information to victims, helping victims navigate the legal process)
- Emergency financial assistance (e.g., vouchers for transportation, food, clothing; past due rent or utility bills; employment counseling)
- Emergency legal advocacy (e.g., assisting victims with preparation of paperwork; accompanying victims to meetings with attorneys and administrative or civil court proceedings)
- Transportation assistance
- Other services

Since the Victim Specialists Program's inception in August of 2016 through December of 2019, the team has served 1,367 victims.⁷ Despite representing only about 10 percent of the Pennington County population, Native Americans make up about 45–50 percent of victims served by victim specialists.⁸ Given the prevalence of

⁵ Information provided by the PCSO.

⁶ Information provided by the PCSO.

⁷ Information provided by the PCSO.

⁸ Information provided by the PCSO.



Native American victims served in Pennington County, this case study highlights promising practices and lessons learned for providing victim services to them. Although the information for this case study comes specifically from the PCSO personnel and Pennington County community-based organizations and victims, we believe that the information can also be generalized for working with Native American victims outside of Pennington County.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is an overarching theme of this case study. The Office for Victims of Crime defines cultural competence as “the ability of an individual or organization to interact effectively with people of different cultures. This includes drawing on knowledge of culturally based values, traditions, customs, language, and behavior to plan, implement, and evaluate service activities.”⁹ Cultural competence can be implemented in a variety of ways, as demonstrated by the promising practices and lessons learned that follow. One example is cultural competence training. Although South Dakota currently does not require this type of training for sworn officers, all personnel from the PCSO law enforcement division have attended training on cultural competence in the past year, and PCSO victim specialists attend yearly training that covers challenges unique to serving Native American crime victims and survivors.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Interviews for this case study revealed several promising practices that the PCSO currently implements in providing services to Native victims. Law enforcement agencies looking to improve their victim services to Native victims could benefit from the information contained in the practices discussed below.

Partner and collaborate with community-based organizations that specialize in serving Native Americans

The PCSO has built relationships with community-based organizations that specialize in serving Native Americans. They include the Red Ribbon Skirt Society,¹⁰ Where All Women Are Honored, and the Monument Health Hospital SANE¹¹ (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners) team. These relationships are both formal and informal. For example, the PCSO has a memorandum of understanding with the Monument Health Hospital SANE team, while its relationships with the other two organizations are more informal. The Red Ribbon Skirt Society provides support to families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Where All Women Are Honored¹² provides shelter and advocates for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and sex trafficking, with a particular focus on Native American victims. The Monument Health Hospital SANE team provides immediate care to sexual assault victims, with a mission of doing so in a culturally sensitive manner.

⁹ https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/model-standards/6/glossary.html#demo2_tip.

¹⁰ See <https://www.shamusproject.com/red-ribbon-skirt-society> for more information.

¹¹ See <https://sdcpcm.com/program/sane-program/> for more information.

¹² See <https://www.whereallwomenarehonored.org/who-we-are> for more information.



This network of community-based organizations is extremely important to the PCSO and the Victim Specialist Program's work with Native American victims, as it provides them with the opportunity to refer victims to service providers and advocacy organizations that are equipped to provide culturally sensitive and competent services. The PCSO victim specialists also have an open invitation to monthly meetings hosted by local victim advocacy organizations; these meetings are intended to foster an informal network of victim advocates.

Bring in local Native American community members to provide trainings

Through their network of community-based organizations, the PCSO arranged for a community leader, who is an enrolled Tribal member, to conduct training for the Sheriff's Office on cultural awareness, related specifically to the Native American community. This community leader conducts the training with help from a second facilitator, who is an enrolled member and current deputy within the PCSO. Together, they provide attendees with an understanding of Native American history, both broadly and within South Dakota. Based on this history, the facilitators provide insight into how to engage better with the Native American community in a culturally aware and sensitive manner. When selecting individuals to lead these trainings, it is important to bring in facilitators who are enrolled members of local tribes to ensure that trainings are relevant and tailored to the specific Native American communities that local agencies serve. In the case of the PCSO, this means bringing in individuals from the neighboring Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River Reservations. A directory of Native American tribes can be found [here](#).

Acknowledge and mitigate the impacts of historical and generational trauma

Historical and generational trauma have an immense impact on the daily lives of Native Americans. Native Americans' historical relationship with the US government has consisted of broken promises, stolen land, massacres, mandatory boarding schools, and other forms of oppression. This trauma is still raw, especially in Pennington County, where the Black Hills were illegally taken from the Sioux Nation. The trauma has stayed with the subsequent generations, including the current Native American population. Thus, some Native Americans can be distrustful of law enforcement agencies, particularly those consisting predominantly of white personnel. Although generational trauma is affected deeply by Native Americans' historical trauma, other factors contribute to generational trauma. For example, when a child grows up in an abusive home, it can affect his or her future home and future children's experiences. One interviewee described generational trauma as having a "ripple effect." Poor coping mechanisms, such as alcoholism and other substance abuse, can exacerbate trauma.

Members of the PCSO Victim Specialists Program recognize these twin traumas and try to tailor their conversations and interactions with victims in a manner that acknowledges them. In practice, this means victim specialists understanding why a Native American victim may be hesitant to seek services or work with personnel from a law enforcement agency. It also means asking the right questions of victims, i.e., taking into account past trauma. The PCSO victim specialists have increased their knowledge of generational and historical



“Generational trauma can contribute to a view that there is not, or never will be, a resolution.”

—Local community advocate

Consider and, when possible, incorporate traditional cultural practices and norms when providing services

For Native American victims, it is important for victim service providers to consider and, when possible, incorporate various cultural practices, norms, and circumstances into how they provide services. From trainings, discussions, frequently and respectfully asking questions, and experiences on the job, the PCSO personnel have learned important cultural practices and norms that they use to tailor their services effectively. Based on such learnings, PCSO personnel have adapted their interactions with Native victims to ensure that they are culturally competent. For example, this can mean not interpreting a lack of eye contact

“The Native community does not want to share their problems—they do not want others to know they are in need.”

—Local community advocate

trauma through the cultural awareness training discussed earlier, other cultural competency trainings, engaging in Native American cultural events, and having open conversations with Native American community members about the trauma they have experienced.

“It’s about taking the time to learn about the culture and communication of the people that you are there to protect, developing a good understanding of the people’s culture and biases, and why they react the way they do.”

—PCSO employee

as a lack of attention; scheduling ample time to meet with victims to avoid cutting a meeting short; being understanding when multiple relatives show up for a meeting with a victim; and being patient with a victim who is not accustomed to sharing personal information.

LESSONS LEARNED

There are a number of lessons learned from interviews completed for this case study. Law enforcement agencies should use the lessons below when considering the structure, operations, and goals of their victim services programs.

Hire Native personnel and/or create volunteer opportunities for Native people

As described earlier, Native Americans’ historical relationship with the US government has led to some distrust toward non-Native people. Recognizing this distrust, it is crucial that victim service providers, both community-based and within law enforcement agencies, hire Native personnel. If limited resources prevent hiring, volunteer opportunities for Native individuals can be created. Several interviewees stressed that Native victims would be more willing to open up and share information with a Native person. For the PCSO,



this requires hiring more personnel or creating volunteer opportunities for enrolled members of the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River Reservations. Having Native personnel or volunteers also helps break down language barriers and provides a sense of comfort if, for example, the victim is able to speak to someone in his or her Native language. For the reservations mentioned above, this would require that victim service providers speak Lakota.

“So when a victim comes in and is not willing to talk, they may be more willing if there were a Lakota person next to them.”

—Local community-based organization leader

Incorporate existing Native personnel into victim service efforts, to the extent they desire such a move

Currently, the PCSO lacks sufficient Native personnel. The PCSO and the community have recognized this problem, and hiring Native personnel remains a priority. In the meantime, the PCSO and the Victim Specialists Program should incorporate the existing Native personnel into victim services efforts, to the extent they desire such a move. Native personnel can be incorporated in a variety of ways, such as ensuring that a Native deputy is on the scene of a crime that involves a Native victim, including Native personnel in victim specialists' conversations with Native victims, and providing opportunities for Native personnel to conduct trainings or discussions with non-Native personnel as it relates to working with Native civilians. It should be noted that these actions are not substitutions for hiring additional personnel and/or creating volunteer opportunities for Native people. In addition, existing Native personnel should not be expected to perform these duties, but, rather, should be provided the opportunity.

Native American communities face a number of economic, public health, and social struggles

Interviewees mentioned a number of economic, public health, and social issues that have affected the Native American community especially hard. They include substance and alcohol abuse, sexual assault and domestic violence, and homelessness. The prevalence of these issues within Native American communities is well documented and supported by existing literature (Bubar, 2009; Fiolet et al., 2019; Genhardt & Woody, 2012; Hart & Lowther, 2008; Hawkins et al., 2004; Jones, 2008; Kasprow & Rosenheck, 1999; Owens, 2013). In addition to the high prevalence of these issues within the Native communities, interviewees also stressed that the services available to the Native community to address such issues are lacking. Substance and alcohol abuse are particularly important to the conversation, as they have been found in many studies to be a contributing factor to or increase the risk of domestic violence (Brookoff et al., 1997; Gruber & Taylor, 2006; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Kantor & Straus, 1989; Pan et al., 1994; Thomas & Bennett, 2009). The prevalence of issues such as substance and alcohol abuse within the Native community is related to historical and generational trauma. It is important for victim service providers to understand the roots of these issues, and their relationship with victimization. One interviewee described that the prevalence of these issues within the Native American community has led to discrimination and apathy from some non-Native people.



Native peoples' connection to and observance of their traditional cultural practices vary

It is important to understand that not every Native victim has the same degree of connection to or observance of his or her traditional cultural practices. Above, we discussed the importance of incorporating traditional cultural practices into the provision of victim services. However, this is dependent on the unique circumstances of the victim in each case. Some Native victims will seek healing from within their culture (e.g., elders, spiritual leaders), while others may seek help more from external victim service providers (e.g., the PCSO Victim Specialists Program). There are various reasons as to why one may seek help from external victim service providers rather than within their culture, and vice versa. Potential reasons could be privacy concerns that arise from seeking services within a small community, or a lack of knowledge of the available traditional cultural practices. Noteworthy, is that the provision of culturally-based services should not be limited to those who identify more strongly with their Native culture. Culturally-based services can be just as valuable to those who may have lost cultural ties. Ultimately, there is no “one size fits all” approach to providing victim services to Native victims, and providers must treat each case independently.

Law enforcement agencies must work to break down barriers between themselves and Native communities

Historical trauma experienced by the Native population has had an immense impact on how they view law enforcement. Native people may be distrustful of law enforcement, and this distrust is exacerbated by the fact that law enforcement agencies tend to be made up predominantly of white personnel. Some Native communities believe that their cases will not be taken seriously by law enforcement. In itself, this belief prevents more Native individuals from reporting cases and seeking victim services. Distrust of law enforcement can also affect how the Native community views Native individuals who join law enforcement agencies. Some may view joining a law enforcement agency negatively, especially if a Native officer mistreats Native victims and offenders. However, Native officers who serve their communities in a professional and respectful manner, are viewed positively. Efforts such as continuing education on Native American culture and history, open communication and engagement with the Native communities, and increased hiring of Native personnel are examples of steps that the PCSO and law enforcement agencies in general can take to help break down barriers and build trust.

BEST PRACTICES FROM THE LITERATURE

In 2004, the Office for Victims of Crime published a resource, titled, *Victim Services: Promising Practices in Indian Country*, highlighting several Native American tribes and victim services programs associated with them. The table below highlights a number of best practices from this resource that are particularly relevant to the promising practices and lessons learned discussed above. To highlight the overarching themes, we have divided the best practices into three focus areas: Cultural Competence, Partnerships and Collaboration, and Access to Resources.



Table 1. Best Practices from the Literature

Focus Area	Best Practice
Cultural Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the cultural knowledge, methods, and resources in the community to make the program culturally relevant and appropriate. • The use of cultural values, philosophies, and practices can enhance the credibility of the programs and increase the success of the services for victims. • Educate the non-Native service provider community on local history, culture, and strengths. • Build respect by hiring Native staff and recruiting Native volunteers. • Facilitate ongoing work with tribal elders.
Partnerships and Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop partnerships through memorandums of understanding with outside agencies to help victims find the resources they need. • Create partnerships. It is vital to link with nontribal entities such as courts and law enforcement for victims of violence who need protection no matter where they travel. To implement the full faith and credit of tribal court judgments, cross-jurisdictional collaboration is key. • Collaborate with other programs. Combining services, such as victim advocacy and legal assistance, in the same facility makes it easier for victims to access resources.
Access to Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide transportation services so that victims will be able to participate in the programs. • Identify financial resources that can be used to support traditional healing practices for victims of crime.

Source: (Office for Victims of Crime, 2004)



CONCLUSION

The PCSO Victim Specialists Program has taken several steps to ensure that Native victims within Pennington County have access to services that are culturally competent. Some of these steps include building a strong network of partner organizations, bringing in local Native community members to provide trainings, and incorporating cultural context into victim services. The Victim Specialists Program is relatively new, and there is always room for growth and improvement. Hiring additional Native personnel or incorporating Native volunteers should remain a priority for the PCSO and other law enforcement agencies serving Native communities. Law enforcement agencies should try to learn as much as they can about the historical and cultural backgrounds of the Native communities they serve. Doing so will not only help to inform victim service practices but will also aid in relationship building between law enforcement agencies and Native communities.



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