

Natives Helping Natives: The Native and Strong Lifeline

Rochelle Amber Camille Williams, MS

Ehattesaht First Nation

Tribal Operations Manager, Volunteers of America
Western Washington



ACKNOWLEDGING OUR TRIBAL NATIONS AND LANDS

We acknowledge that Volunteers of America Western Washington is on the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish Peoples, particularly Tulalip, Snohomish, Stillaguamish, and Sauk-Suiattle.

These tribes and nations ceded millions of acres of land in exchange for a small amount of money and permanent protection by the United States government under the Treaty of Point Elliott in 1855. This treaty preserved the right of Native peoples to retain their fishing, hunting, and gathering rights, and it remains as relevant today as it was the day it was signed.

Our responsibility to recognize the injustices of colonization – stolen land, forced assimilation, dispersion, and violence – is the foundation of a pledge to address enduring trauma by becoming better allies to our Tribal communities.

We see you. We seek to cultivate authentic relationships and honor our commitments. We respect your sovereignty and right of self-determination.

Accordingly, we challenge all who engage with us in our mission of strengthening our communities to actively support Native peoples. Embrace their narratives, advocate for equitable opportunities, endorse Native-owned businesses, and honor their lands and waters by being a good steward of the earth.



DURING OUR TIME TOGETHER WE HOPE TO:

Tell

- the story of the development of the Native and Strong Lifeline

Share

- where we are at in the journey and what is to come

Answer

- any questions and listen to any comments you may have

WHAT IS THE NATIVE AND STRONG LIFELINE?

The Native and Strong Lifeline is the first state-wide American Indian/Alaska Native specific suicide and crisis line

Native and Strong is a part of Washington state 988 funding

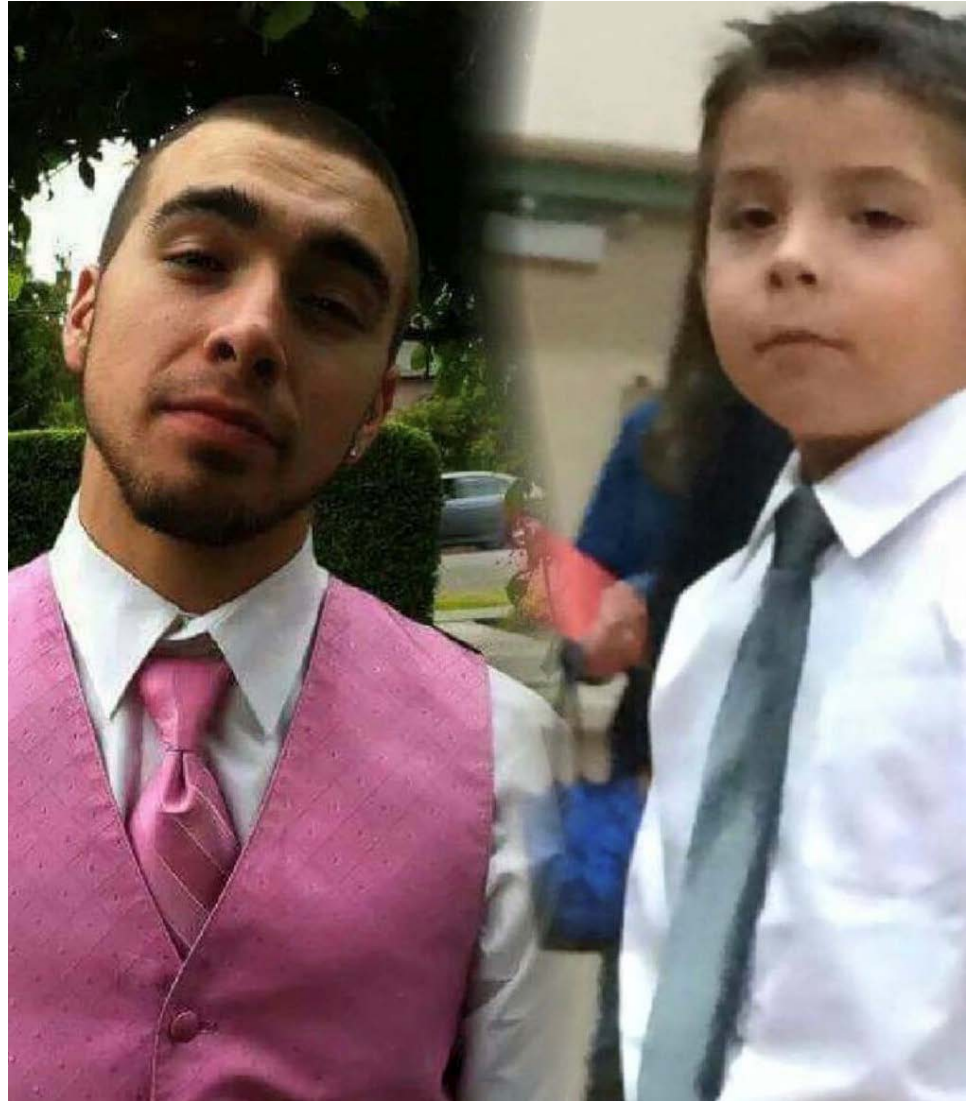
The Native and Strong Lifeline exists because of the passage of HB1477 which acknowledged the need for this service for the 29 federally recognized Tribes in Washington state

The Native and Strong Lifeline is operated by and for, Indigenous people

WHY DO WE NEED THE NATIVE AND STRONG LIFELINE

Suicide disproportionately affects
Native Americans and Alaska
Natives

Native communities
experience higher rates of
suicide compared to all other racial
and ethnic groups in the U.S., with
suicide being the eighth leading
cause of death for American
Indians and Alaska Natives across
all ages. (Says, 2020)



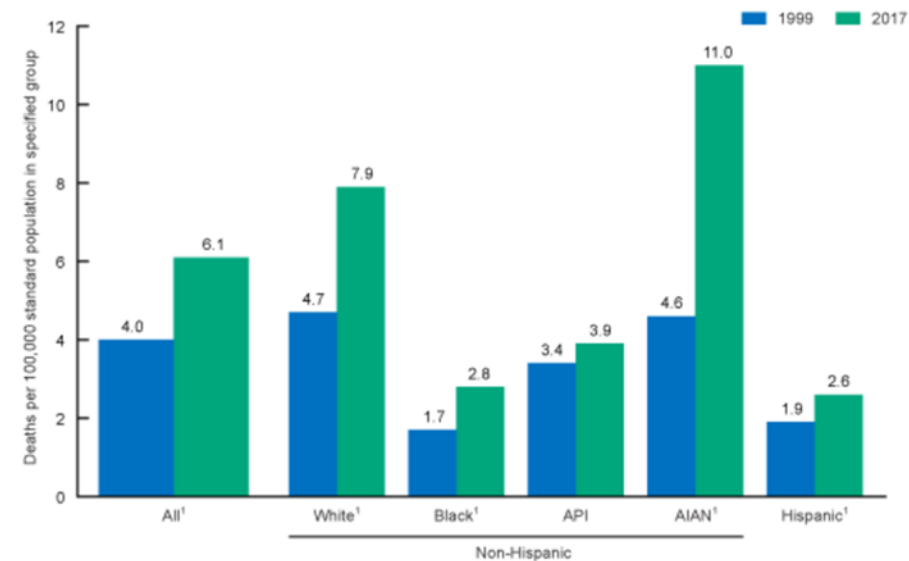


SUICIDE AND OUR NATIVE MEN

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among AI/AN people ages 10 -34 years. The highest rates are among the males between the ages of 15-24, (Says et al., 2020)

NATIVE WOMEN AND SUICIDE

Figure 1. Age-adjusted suicide rates for females, by race and ethnicity: United States, 1999 and 2017



¹Significant difference in rates between 1999 and 2017 ($p < 0.05$).

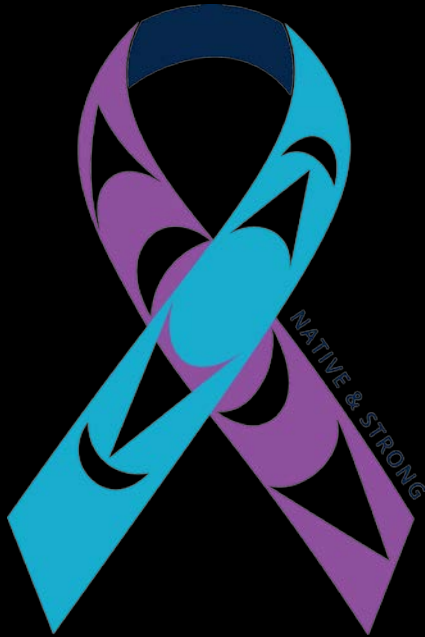
Suicide among AI/AN women is up 139% from 1999 to 2017, respectfully. (Dastagir, 2019)



SUICIDE AND OUR REVERED TWO-SPIRIT RELATIVES

“...research indicates that the suicide risk for Two-Spirit people is greater than among the heterosexual Aboriginal population. Research has found that homophobia, isolation, and rejection increase the risk of suicide for Two-Spirit people.”(Hunt, 2016)

HOW DOES THE NATIVE AND STRONG LIFELINE WORK?



The Native and Strong Lifeline is accessible by dialing 988 and selecting option 4.

For Example, when you call 988 you will be asked to press 1 for the Veterans Crisis Line, 2 for Spanish speaking, 3 for the LGBTQ+ Trevor Project line and now, you will be able to press 4 for the Native and Strong Lifeline

Native and Strong Lifeline is operational 24/7, 365 days a year

Native and Strong Lifeline calls are answered by other Natives

Native/Tribal Crisis Counselors answer with their tribal affiliation.

Our Native and Strong Lifeline counselors include enrolled Tribal members, and descendants closely affiliated with their Native community or Tribe

WHO CAN ACCESS THIS SERVICE?

Any tribally affiliated person in the state of Washington

This includes:

American Indians, Alaska Natives, First Nations, Tribally enrolled and *unenrolled* people who are of Indigenous descent

This service is not specific to any one Washington Tribe but is inclusive of all tribal people in the state whether their tribe is located in Washington or elsewhere

Not only can individuals access this service but so can concerned family members, Indian Health Care Providers, Social Workers, etc.

Think anybody that is wanting to assist a person who may be in crisis or need support

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

When we started contemplating what we would call the Native and Strong Lifeline we had some major considerations

How do we make it relatable?

How do we remain inclusive of all of our fellow Natives?

What would make ME, as an Indigenous woman, want to call?

What would make an Indigenous man or Two-Spirit person want to call?



WE CONSIDERED A FEW OF THE FOLLOWING, NOT LIKING ANY OF THEM:



Washington state Tribal Suicide and Crisis Line

Native Help and Crisis Line

Native Support and Help Line

As you know, none of these were the right fit

WHERE THE EAGLE ACTUALLY LANDED

The name Native and Strong came up as part of another Native Behavioral Health campaign in our state who was willing to share it

This made the most sense as it reflected that any Native could call for support and also, that it was not a showing of weakness, but of strength

We wanted to eliminate the word “Tribal” which typically indicates only enrolled members

We wanted to eliminate the “state” part of the name, as many of us don’t trust much in government programs or those we perceive to be government operated

We wanted to eliminate “crisis” as people might not call unless they are on the verge of suicide. It is important that everybody knows they can call at anytime for any reason, not just the most extreme circumstances



NOT FORGETTING OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS



It is important to us to include our unenrolled Brothers and Sisters

Many of us have families where we share the same blood and some of us are enrolled, some of us aren't

This doesn't make a person less Native

Tribal sovereignty allows all our Tribes and Nations to decide who has membership and who can enroll

This often changes and the requirements are different for each Tribe

Many of us have relatives who are unable or unwilling to enroll for a variety of reasons and we refuse to lose more of our people to suicide, whether they have enrollment cards or not

We are the First People of this land and yet, we are the only population who continually has to prove who they are by way of membership

WHO AM I CALLING? ALL NATIVE STAFF



Every crisis counselor at the Native and Strong Lifeline is an Indigenous person

This means that our counselors include enrolled Tribal members, and descendants closely affiliated with their Native Community or Tribe

You are calling another Native person who cares to listen and connect with you

You are connecting with a trained crisis counselor; *just as the non-Tribal Lifeline is trained, so are the Native and Strong Lifeline Counselors*

The training difference is that we have added traditional and cultural elements as well as training on historical and intergenerational trauma

OUR TEAM AT THE NATIVE AND STRONG LIFELINE

We currently have a Tribal Operations Manager, Native and Strong Lifeline Coordinator, Washington Indian Behavioral Health Hub Coordinator and the most important members of the team:

Our Native Crisis Counselors



*Actual Native Counselors, 2022 ☺

OUR COUNSELORS AND MANAGEMENT TEAM ARE FROM VARIOUS TRIBES ACROSS THE STATE AND COUNTRY, INCLUDING:

The Tulalip Tribes

Navajo Nation

Ehattesaht First
Nation

Confederated
Tribes of the
Colville Reservation

Yakama Nation

Spokane Tribe

Quileute Nation

Confederated
Tribes of the
Chehalis
Reservation

Tsimshian

LIVED AND SHARED EXPERIENCES: ITS MORE THAN PAPER

We place a high value on lived experiences

We recruit staff based on their lived experiences and desire to participate in supporting our new culture of healing

We do not exclusively recruit based on degrees but based on experience in our communities, behavioral health and other relevant fields

Cultural traditions and understanding are key qualifications



CHALLENGES

Gaining Trust- are we real?

Many Indigenous people lack trust in many programs and with good reason

Often, we expect Tribal/Indigenous programs to fail or be operated by people who don't know us



CHALLENGES CONTINUED



Being a real part of 988



A few weeks prior to the 988 launch, we had learned that there was no intention or work being done on being a true part of 988 and that no dial pad option was going to magically appear before launch



This didn't make sense to us. The idea that 988 is easier to remember than 1-800 number was the whole point



We reached out to some of our friends and the staff at Vibrant to set up a meeting to discuss our options



We stated that we as a program were fully staffed, trained and ready



Our only missing piece was a number for people to press when they dialed 988



We got news that we would have a dial pad option and then set a launch date after testing

OPPORTUNITIES

Promoting a culture of healing across Indian Country

Bringing AI/AN mental health into focus

Being a starting point, example and support for others who wish to have a specific suicide and crisis line

Natives working together to make a difference for ALL of us



**If your family is struggling,
you don't have to do it alone.
Native and Strong Lifeline
is here for you. Call 988, option 4.**



988 SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE

Native and Strong Lifeline logo artist: Jason LaClair, Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe



*If you are struggling,
you don't have to do it alone.*

**Native and Strong
Lifeline
is here for you.**

Call 988 and choose option 4.

Calls are answered by trained
crisis counselors who are Tribal
members and descendants with
close ties to their community.



988
SUICIDE
& CRISIS
LIFELINE

Native and Strong Lifeline logo artist: Jason LaClair, Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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