

## American Indian Education Center



<b>Project Title:</b>	Strong and Stable Native Youth
<b>Award Amount:</b>	\$757,570
<b>Type of Grant:</b>	Social and Economic Development Strategies
<b>Project Period:</b>	Sept. 2006 – Sept. 2009
<b>Grantee Type:</b>	Native Nonprofit

### PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 5 jobs created
- 1 Native American consultant hired
- 7 elders involved
- 250 youth involved
- \$196,354 in resources leveraged
- 307 individuals trained
- 42 partnerships formed
- 8 native language classes held

### BACKGROUND

Established in 1992, the American Indian Education Center (AIEC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the cultural, educational, and socioeconomic status of 5,000 Native Americans in the greater Cleveland area through educational and social service programs.

### PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the project was to enhance family communication and cohesiveness; improve family mental and physical health; and increase cultural pride, identity, skills, and knowledge among the families and community members participating. The

project's first objective was to produce and implement a culturally-tailored version of the Strengthening Families Program (SFP) curriculum for 80 native youth and 80 native adults, promoting strong and stable native youth and families. Instead of using the SFP curriculum, however, the AIEC team developed its own curriculum focusing on topics such as: anger management; stress reduction; historical trauma and the effects of history; alcohol and drug abuse; and life skills for parents and children. Project staff began implementing the curriculum in the first quarter of the second year, hosting five 2 ½-hour sessions per quarter. For each session, children and parents were placed into separate groups, where they participated in parallel talking circles to express their thoughts on a particular aspect of the curriculum. Later, they convened for interactive games and activities promoting dialogue and communication. Through this objective, the project reached 111 youth and 141 adults over the next two years.

The second objective was to implement Project Family Success, providing 112 native youth and 112 native adults with case management services to increase access to community-based behavioral and physical

health services, enhance their social support systems, and enable them to develop plans for adapting to their personal, social, or economic circumstances. To achieve this, project staff created an 84-point assessment form identifying health considerations, personal issues, work orientation, career and life planning skills, adaptation skills, and education and training. Project staff then recruited 86 families, 61 of which were assessed for their needs and offered appropriate services. Participating families received counseling and guidance in how to access health and social services; find work; build life and work skills; and address difficult, destabilizing family and personal issues. Staff provided referrals for health and behavioral treatment as needed and assisted families in finding a “regular medical home” within 30 days of their initial assessment.

The third objective was to implement a series of native crafts and traditions classes for 126 youth and 126 adults, to increase cultural identity, pride, and connectedness. The project team conducted weekly classes throughout the project period, on topics such as: traditional singing; drumming; dancing; beading; cooking Native fry bread and other Native foods; Navajo language; making dream catchers; sweat lodge; and Native American history. During the third year of the project, staff conducted project objectives one and three simultaneously, conducting family strengthening sessions and culture sessions together to involve a greater number of people in both aspects of the project. This enabled more people to strengthen cultural pride and social identity as they worked toward solving difficult life issues. Over a 3-year period, the classes involved 143 youth and 189 adults.

#### **OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

During each quarter of the project, staff and partners surveyed participants to determine

what they learned. Responses indicated nearly 100% of participating families increased their sense of cohesiveness, improved their communication, and felt more supported in the community. The project significantly reduced the prevalence of psychological barriers to strong families and healthy relationships. Parents reported they had enhanced and developed various parental skills, and children reported improved social skills, peer relations, and relationships with parents. Over 90% of participants in the community crafts, traditions, and values classes reported having a greater sense of native pride, and over 80% stated that their participation in the project made them feel more connected to native traditions.

Families receiving case management services indicated they had greater access to health care, including infant development and health screenings at local clinics, and on-site services such as diabetes and HIV testing. Referrals provided many with regular access to medical facilities, including Veterans Administration hospitals and area free clinics. Many families experienced improved diets after taking nutrition classes and using local community food banks. Several individuals participated in job skills training, many received jobs, and three project participants started their own micro-businesses during the project period.

Project staff feel the curricula they have developed and the types of services they have established, both in the office and through the referrals they make, do much to address the social, health, educational, and economic issues of Native Americans in Cleveland, and will help community members for many years to come.