



# Native American Peer Support & The Value of Connection

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# Opening Activity: Medicine Wheel Mindfulness

From John Soap, Jr. and The Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma Behavioral Health



# Land Acknowledgement

The Southern Plains Tribal Health Board serves 44 tribal nations in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. We acknowledge these are the traditional lands of the Osage, Caddo, Kiowa, Comanche, Wichita, and Kickapoo People, and pay respect to the elders both past and present. We recognize and honor the diverse Indigenous peoples connected to this land. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced all eastern tribes to abandon their ancestral homelands to move to west of the Mississippi River in the Indian Territory. The Five Tribes relocated to present-day Oklahoma while others moved further north, only to be forced out again by white settlement with the passing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. Tribes remaining in Texas were forced north of the Red River in 1859. After the Civil War, tribes were pushed to reservations in Indian Territory. Many tribes living in Kansas were assigned reservations in 1867 by the Medicine Lodge Treaty. It is vital to understand these beginnings and remember the ongoing dedication tribal nations have to the land that we gather, live, learn and work on.



# Southern Plains Tribal Health Board

- SPTHB is a non-profit organization based in Oklahoma City, OK
- Serves as a liaison between the Tribal Nations we serve and the National Indian Health Board (NIHB), who works closely with our U.S. Legislators in Washington D.C., advocating for American Indian health.
- Improve tribal public health outcomes for American Indians through partnerships, advocacy, education, data, and research, as well as training.
- SPTHB houses the OK Tribal Epidemiology Center that assists American Indian health systems and programs by improving access to the highest quality AI/AN data available.



# Poll

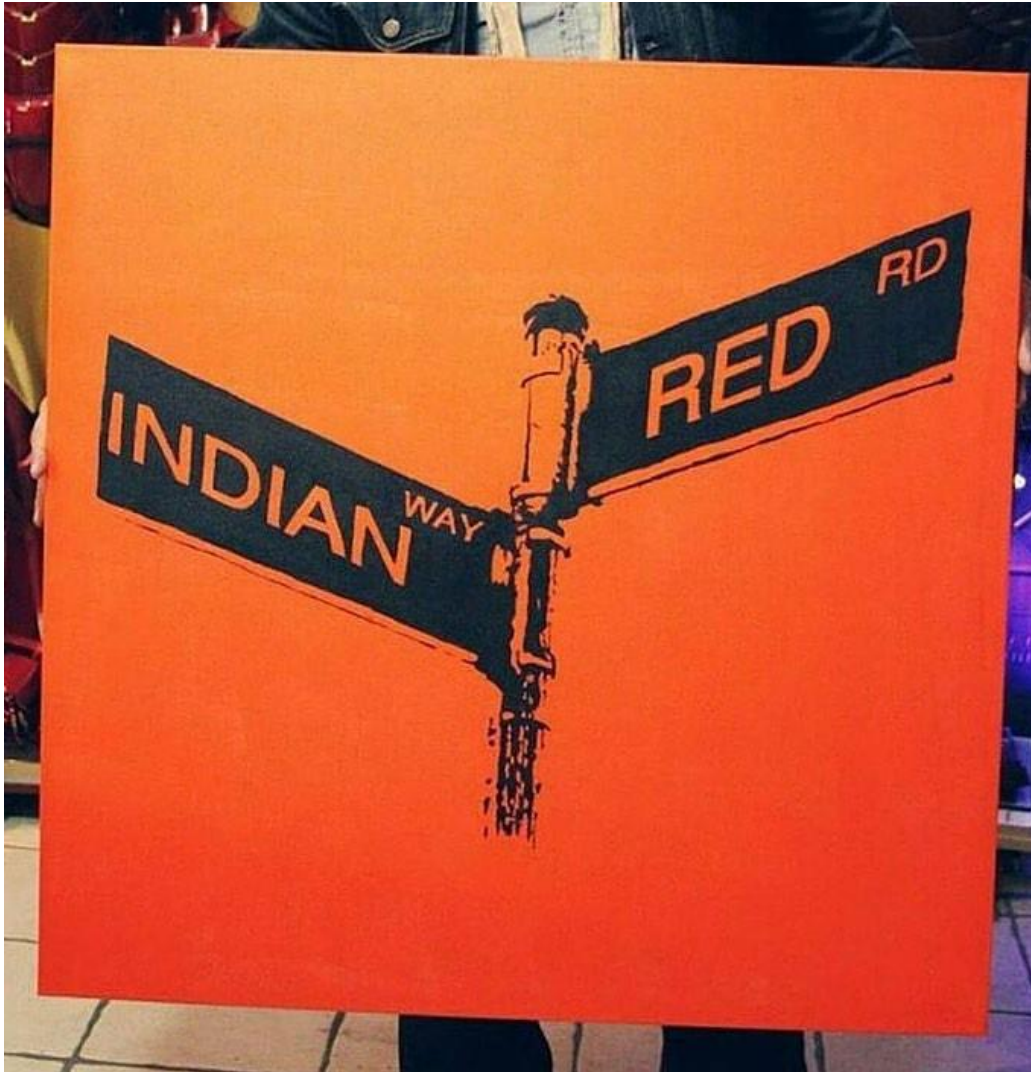
- Do you identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native?
  - Yes
  - No
- If yes, what tribal affiliation?  
Answer in chat!
- Do you work with tribal communities?
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Rarely

# Native Roots of Peer Support

- Talking circles are thousands of years old.
- Purification and prayer ceremonies
  - “Admit to yourself, to God, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs”
  - Medicine Wheel teachings
- Early abstinence-based cultural and religious revitalization movements were created by Native people in recovery
  - The “wounded healer”



# Alignment with Indigenous values



- Storytelling
- Connection to the community
  - Peers help re-connect people to the community/culture
  - Peers find self-worth and purpose in their role in the community
- Reciprocity (e.g. service to others, recovery as a daily lifestyle)
- Respect (e.g., honoring the lived experience)
- Spirituality

Photo Credit: Steven Paul Judd

# Peers in Indian Country Today (OK)

- Paid peer positions relatively new in Indian Country in Oklahoma
- Previous issues with state certification at tribal facilities
- In 2018, SPTHB funded the position of three peers working with tribes and tribal behavioral health departments
  - Brand new program at all locations
  - Program has expanded
- Oklahoma Health Care Authority passed legislation to make Peer Recovery Support Specialist Medicaid reimbursable beginning September 2021.



# Isolation in Peer Support

- Struggles with supervision and support at work
  - Coworkers did not know what peer support looked like
  - Peers were new to the position and tasked with building their programs
- Saw the need for connection and support from other Peers working in Indian Country
  - Seems that this was needed outside of Oklahoma as well
  - Participants have mentioned about cultural isolation they have experienced at work



# Importance of Peer Support for Peers

- Recovery first
- Prevent burnout
- Setting healthy boundaries
- Cultural understanding for Native Peers



# Importance of Culturally-Relevant Program

- Cultural is prevention and culture is healing
  - Don Coyhis (Mohican Nation) – founder of White Bison Wellbriety Institute
    - “In the English language, culture means that everybody does it, but it really is a set of principles, laws, and values that is in harmony with the Earth. It can be Native teachings. It can be the Bible. Culture is going back to the principles, laws and values so that drinking and drugging isn’t something you want to do, because your culture has ways to help you deal with the hurt” (Coyhis, 2009).
- Understanding Historical and Intergenerational Trauma Informed Care
- “Peer support adds an element of personal and cultural connection for clients that perhaps conventional therapy cannot add...Being able to share my own experience of how ancestral culture and language can aid in healing from historical trauma added a deeper dimension to my recovery journey.” –Jim W., Peer ECHO Council Member



# Open Discussion

- In what ways do you bring your own culture to your work? Do you ever share your culture?
- Do you ever feel isolated at work because your culture is different than your coworkers?



INDIAN + COUNTRY

ECHO

LEADING THE WAY 

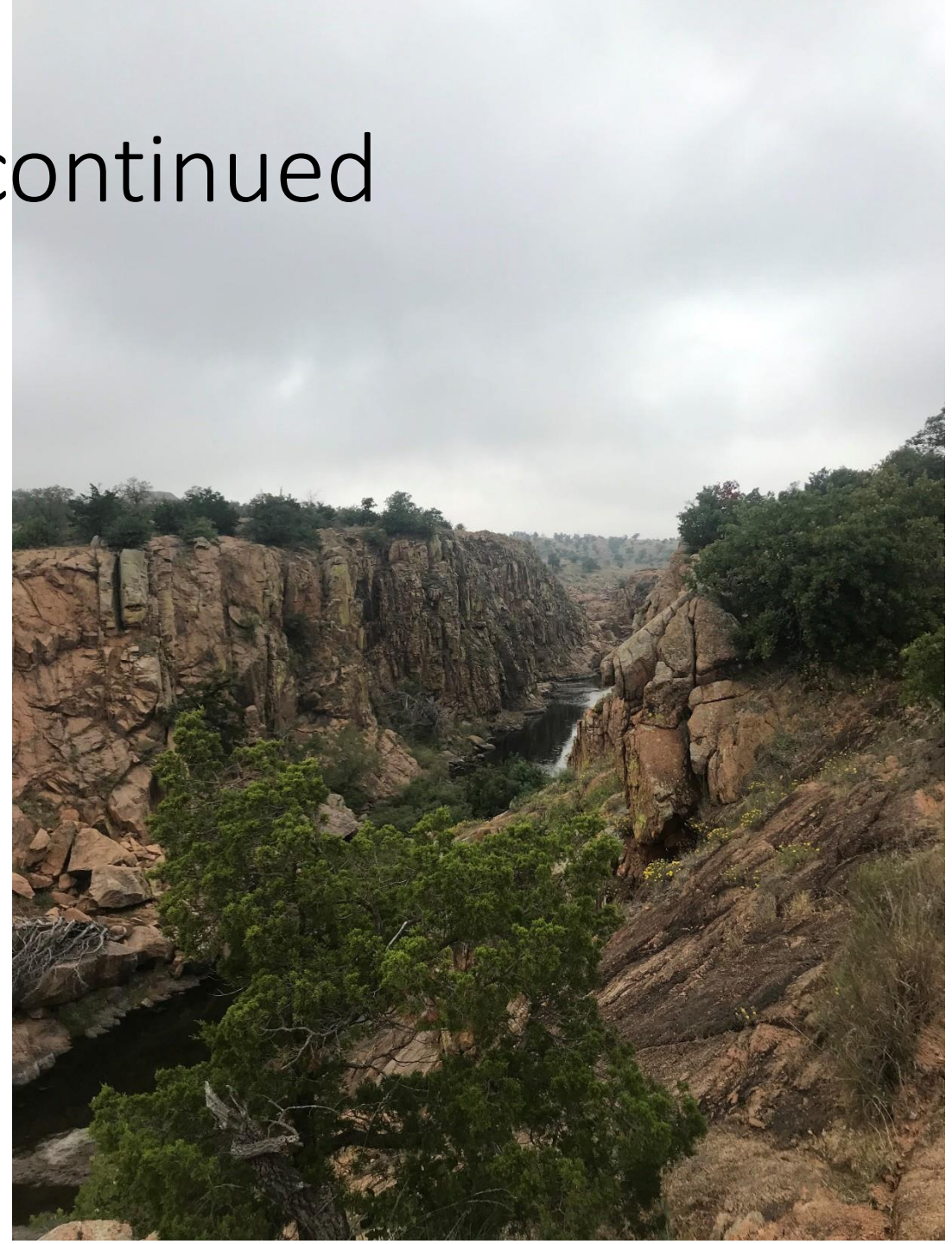
*Growing the Ability to Deliver Quality Healthcare to  
American Indian and Alaska Native People.*

# Overview of the Indian Country Peer Recovery Support ECHO

- Model from University of New Mexico
- Started in April 2020
- Meets once a month online for a didactic and case presentation
- Didactic Presentation
  - Decolonizing Mental Health Services
  - Fentanyl and Harm Reduction
  - Integrating Culture into Peer Recovery Support
- Case Presentation with Wellness Wheel
- Council members provide recommendations and feedback to case presentation
  - Debra Buffaloboy, CADC II & Peer
  - Jessica Carrol, MA:PMHCA, PWS
  - Jim Wikel, PWS

# Overview of ECHO continued

- Meets once a month for Talking Circle
  - Open discussion
  - Additional space for connection
- Cite connection as the most valuable part of the Peer ECHO
  - “connecting with peers across the country”
  - “cultural connections”



# Development of Peer ECHO

- Didactic schedule developed through surveys and conversations with peers, then evaluations from Peer ECHO
- Created short (5-question) evaluation for participants
- Targeted Audience
  - Network of those providing peer services through White Bison Wellbriety Trainings, conversations with tribal partners and partnership with NPAIHB
- Originally scheduled to start in Summer of 2020, moved up to April 2020
  - COVID 19
- Huge positive response
  - Started offering Office Hours, later renamed to Talking Circle
- Takeaways
  - Offering a space for connection and advice can make a huge difference



# Developed for Indian Country by Indian Country



- Culture integrated naturally into the ECHO at every level
- Addresses unique needs of peer support in Indian Country. Examples from case presentations:
  - Ethics of providing peer support to relatives
  - Success stories of the difference cultural connection has made with their clients
  - Shared understanding of the impact of historical trauma on both peers attending and the outcomes described in the case study

# Direct Decolonization Efforts of the Peer Recovery ECHO

- Expanded time for introductions and discussion
- Opens with a grounding activity or prayer and closes with prayer
- Wellness Wheel case form adopted from the Tribal MAT ECHO Program
- Expert faculty → Council Members



# Needs that the Peer ECHO Meets

- ECHO provides mentorship and support through:
  - Case studies
  - Council member recommendations
  - Feedback from Peers working in Indian Country (in Talking Circle and Full ECHO)
- Sharing Culture
  - language and stories
- Peer support for peers
  - At its core, peer support is relationship-focused, recovery orientated, trauma-informed, and mutual (SAMHSA, 2020)
  - Peer ECHO has developed into a trusted space in which people share their stories and validate others' struggles at work and in recovery
  - Creates more confident peers and strong recovery network; helps provide quality peer services in Indian Country

# Sample Case Presentation

# Gaps/Needs ID'd

- Sustainability of the position in Oklahoma
- National certification?
  - Cultural relevancy
- Training for supervisors and team
  - Advocacy and education about the peer role
- Collaboration across treatment teams and community resources
- Resources for peers' clients
  - Housing continually mentioned on the ECHO
  - Family support services
  - Employment
  - Treatment programs



# What is most valuable about the Peer ECHO?

- “Networking and gaining insight from my peers around Turtle Island.”
- “Having other supportive and genuine peer professionals is imperative to my self-care.”
- “I love the different presentations and case studies. Sometimes I get lost and my flame gets dim, but coming to the ECHO's always help me get back on track. Great support and information”
- **Consider: what support networks do the people you work with have? Should you build one?**

# In closing,

- As you all know, there is power in connection and sharing your story.
- The healing we do today impacts generations to come
- Any questions? Comments?

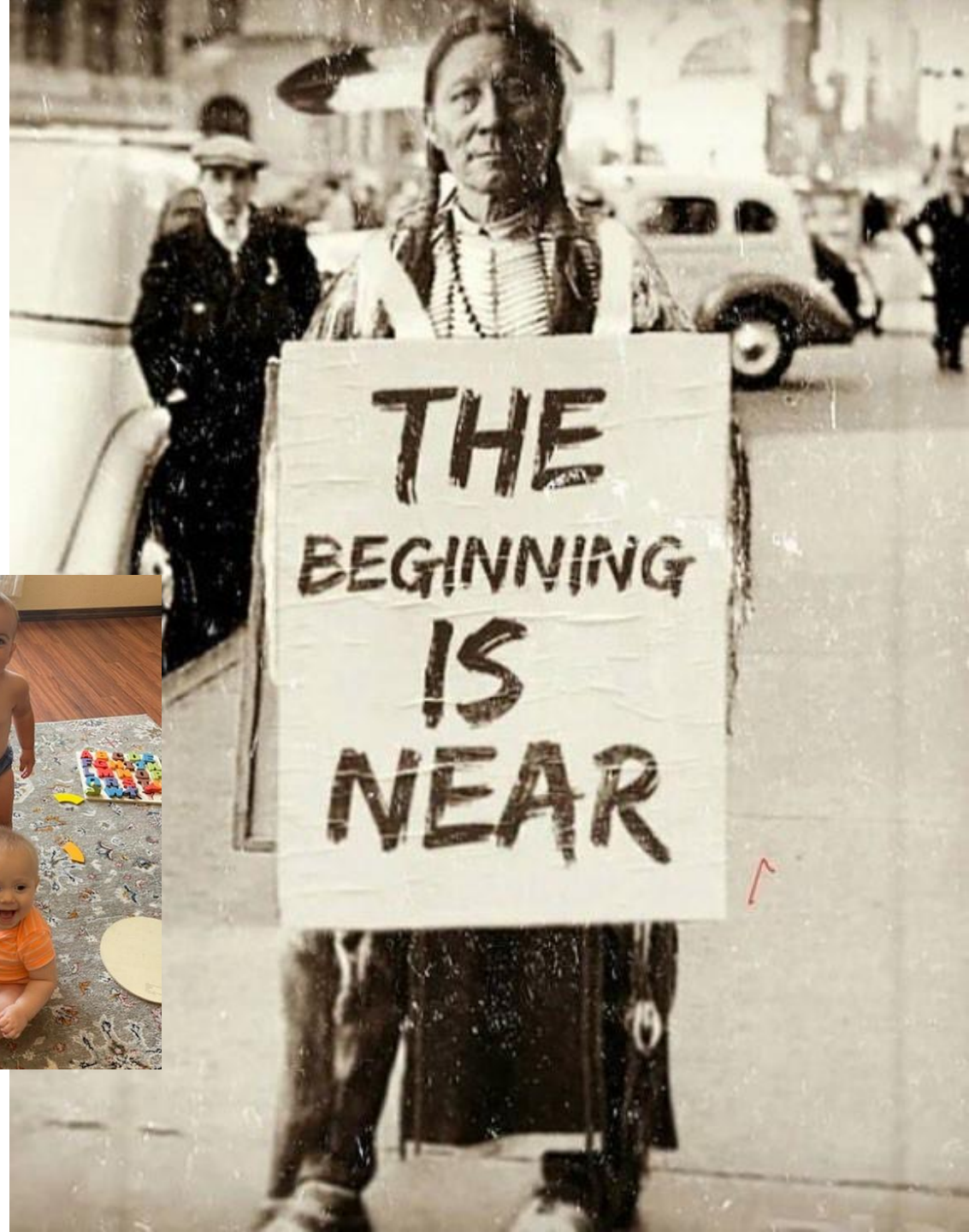


Photo credit: Steven Paul Judd

# Join Our Peer ECHO!

- **Peer Recovery ECHO Program**
- ***2nd Wednesday of the month @ 12-1:30 PST/2-3:30pm CT  
(Peer Recovery ECHO)***
- ***4th Wednesday of the month @ 12-1 PST/2-3pm CT  
(Talking Circle)***
- <https://www.indiancountryecho.org/program/peer-recovery-specialist/>
- Lyndi Seabolt, [lseabolt@spthb.org](mailto:lseabolt@spthb.org)
- Casey Ward-Freeman, [cward-freeman@spthb.org](mailto:cward-freeman@spthb.org)