

PREFACE

Jill Shepard Erickson, M.S.W., A.C.S.W.

The story of the Circles of Care initiative is one that demonstrates the power of thoughtful collaboration for addressing critical health policy issues. Under Circles of Care, the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), part of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), in partnership with Indian Health Service (IHS), the National Institute for Mental Health, (NIMH), and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Department of Justice (OJJDP) have provided critical funding and technical assistance to federally recognized tribes and urban American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities to plan, design, and assess the feasibility of a culturally respectful mental health system of care for their children and families.

The initiative represents the collective vision of a large number of AI/AN tribal members, service providers, advocates, researchers, and federal agency representatives who met as an Advisory Board to CMHS regarding potential initiatives to address the unique mental health needs of American Indian and Alaska Native children, adolescents, and their families. Beginning in 1994, the Advisory Board met over a period of 4 years to develop consensus for the overall design of the project. Gary De Carolis, M.Ed, CMHS and Albert Hiat, Ph.D., of the IHS provided the initial vision and impetus for the Circles of Care. Nelba Chavez, Ph.D., Bernard Arons, M.D., Michael English, J.D., Diane Sondheimer, M.S.N., M.P.H., C.P.N.P., of CMHS, Douglas Dodge, J.D., of OJJDP, and Ann Hohmann, Ph.D., NIMH, provided support for the initiative. Expert testimony on the state of American Indian and Alaska Native mental health was provided for the series of meetings and led by Spero Manson, Ph.D., Director, National Center for American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research, University of Colorado. The initiative builds upon the needs identified in the Congressional report of 1990, *Indian Adolescent Mental Health*, edited by Dr. Manson, and later described in a report commissioned by CMHS and compiled by Terry Cross, ACSW, and staff of the National Indian Child Welfare Association and Georgetown University: *American Indian Children's Mental Health Services: An Assessment of Tribal Access to Children's Mental Health Funding and a Review of Tribal Mental Health Programs*, 1996.

We are grateful for the wisdom and direction provided for the initiative by the Advisory Board, in the series of discussions facilitated by Terry Cross, Executive Director, National Indian Child Welfare Association. Members included:

1. Virginia Hill, MSW, Director of Social Services, Southern Indian Health Council, Alpine, California, National Congress of American Indians, Children's Committee.
2. Dixie Jordan, (Eastern Cherokee) Families and Advocates Partnership for Education, Pacer Center, Minneapolis.
3. Arliss Keckler, (Lakota) Health Director, (retired), Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, South Dakota.
4. Tracy King, (Assiniboine) To-ga-he-yo-he Youth Ranch, Harlem, Montana.
5. Art Martinez, Ph.D., (Chumash) Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California.
6. Penny McClellan, Ph.D., San Diego American Indian Health Center.
7. Greer McSpadden, MSW, (Cherokee) First Nations Clinic, Albuquerque, NM.
8. Gary Peterson, MSW, (Skokomish), Professor, Evergreen State College, Shelton WA.
9. Jenny Rodgers, MPH (Navajo) Navajo Nation Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

This Special Issue describes the process and outcomes of the unique program evaluation efforts conducted by the first seven grantees, funded from 1998 to 2001. A second set of grantees have been funded from 2001 to 2004. Given the enthusiastic support of the current SAMHSA (Charles Curie, A.C.S.W., Kathryn Power, M.Ed., Sybil Goldman, M.S.W.) and IHS (Jon Perez, Ph.D.) administrations, we anticipate awarding a third set of grants in 2005.

In line with priorities and objectives of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003), the Circles of Care initiative seeks to reduce mental health disparities and increase the cultural competence and effectiveness of systems of care for AI/AN children and families. The initiative bridges the gap from "service to science" by utilizing a community-based evaluation effort that identifies community needs, barriers to accessing services, service system gaps, local protocols for the inclusion of traditional healing, and the potential community and outside resources available to address mental health needs. This comprehensive evaluation effort enables Circles of Care grantees to develop model systems of care that are consistent with community needs

and values and feasible given community resources. The publication of this Special Issue fulfills one of the key goals of the Circles of Care initiative, “to provide a blueprint that other tribal and urban Indian organizations or other agencies involved in service delivery to American Indian and Alaska Native children can use to guide implementation and/or modification and improvement of current service systems (Federal Center for Mental Health Services, 1998, p. 6).” We hope this Special Issue proves to be a useful “blueprint” for similar efforts in both AI/AN communities.

Jill Shepard Erickson, MSW, ACSW
Center for Mental Health Services
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Suite 11-C-16
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

References

- Federal Center for Mental Health Services. (1998). *Circles of Care: Planning, designing, and assessing mental health service system models for Native American Indian and Alaska Native children and their families (guidance for applicants)*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. (2003). *Achieving the promise: Transforming mental health care in America*. Rockville, MD: President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health.