**Systems of Care in Tribal Communities: Teaching Notes**

By

Amanda Cross-Hemmer

**Learning Objectives:**

1. Learn about systems of care
2. Be aware of the availability (generally) of appropriate mental health services for children and adolescents in Native communities
3. Understand the purpose of the Circles of Care program
4. Explore the lingering impacts of colonization on mental health and community planning efforts in Indian Country
5. Explore the potential impacts of participation in community-driven planning processes

**Audience:** Suitable for college students, undergraduate through graduate studies. This case is especially useful for study in social work, American Indian studies, sociology, psychology, political science, and public administration.

**Implementation:** The case can be taught over a single class session or multiple sessions. Small group discussions would be helpful in addressing key questions in the case. A second group exercise allows for deeper grappling with the issues presented. Encouraging students to do additional research is also recommended.

**Group Assignment 1:** Break students into groups. Assign each group a set of the questions below organized under a general theme. Someone in the group must agree to be a note taker. The groups should discuss their questions and record their conclusions. They should be prepared to report out to the larger group, sharing their questions and responses.

*Group 1-Understanding the context: Children’s mental health in Indian Country*

1. What are some of the issues with available data on children’s mental health in American Indian communities? What is understood on this topic, and what information is lacking?
2. For what reasons might the mainstream concept of “poor mental health” be uncomfortable for Native parents and children?
3. Describe the likely resource options facing Amy’s and Brandon’s parents as they try to get help for their children. What service options are likely to be available for getting help? What barriers are they likely to encounter?
4. Come up with one or two additional questions you might use for this case with your students.

*Group 2-The systems paradigm: Systems of Care for children with SED*

1. What would a system of care response look like for Brandon? For Amy? Consider the agencies that might need to be involved, and the kinds of services they might need as well as family involvement.
2. Do you think the kinds of problems Brandon and Amy exhibit will be equally well served by a system of care response? Why or why not? Are one child’s problems more suited to this approach than the others?
3. What benefits and/or drawbacks of systems of care responses do you see for Native children? For their parents? For their extended family and community? Use Amy and Brandon as examples.
4. Come up with one or two additional questions you might use for this case with your students.

*Group 3-Circles of Care: System of Care plans for Native children*

1. What unique challenges might tribal communities have faced in applying for systems of care grants? What are some reasons their applications may have been unsuccessful?
2. Name some ways Circles of Care grantees’ mental health service models differ from mainstream models. What concepts or service options are likely to be different?
3. Apply the information from the question above. What would a Circles of Care plan for Brandon look like? For Amy? How might plans created in the tribal Circles of Care context be different from mainstream System of Care plans?
4. Come up with one or two additional question you might use in this case with your students.

*Group 4-Putting the pieces together*

1. What does the Circles of Care story reveal about the effects of colonization on tribal communities? What effects are highlighted?
2. What does the Circles of Care story suggest about the resilience of tribal communities?
3. What are some of the positive aspects of participating in a Circles of Care planning process for tribal communities? Are there aspects of participation that are problematic?
4. Come up with one or two additional questions that you might use doing this case with your students.

**Group Assignment 2:** After each group has reported out the answers to their questions, have them consider the following scenario. They are to imagine they are in the roles assigned below. From the perspective of their role, they must decide whether or not to recommend an application for their community for a Circles of Care grant. For the purposes of this exercise, their community is a mid size (1500 -2000 member) tribe situated in a rural (but not frontier) location in the Pacific Northwest where Amy and Brandon are tribal members.

*Group 1***-** A tribal council member

*Group 2***-** A health program administrator

*Group 3***-** A mental health therapist

*Group 4*- A parent of a child with a SED

Each group should consider the information presented in the case and discuss whether or not they believe their community should apply for a Circles of Care grant. The groups must be prepared to describe the considerations involved in their decision-making process.

Groups may want to consider the following issues as they think through their responses:

* How important is the lack of evidence of improved outcomes at the individual level for systems of care approaches in deciding whether or not to pursue a Circles of Care grant?
* Does participation in the Circles of Care planning process carry any inherent risk? To whom? Why or why not?
* Does it seem likely that the products produced by a Circles of Care initiative will be useful and bring about desired outcomes?
* If this community does not apply for a Circles of Care grant, what approach might they take in helping Amy and Brandon? Is a planning process what is needed?

If a group feels they do not have enough information to make the decision, ask them to make a list of things they feel they would need to know in order to make the decision. They should also be able to identify how having this information would impact the decision. Encourage the use of “if/then” type statements in their report.

**Research Questions**

1. Do research on “evidence-based practice” in child and adolescent mental health services. What is known about what works, and for whom?
2. Public (federal and state) and private funders have increasingly demanded that grantees use “evidence-based” interventions. What has been the impact of “evidence-based practice” on tribal child-serving programs? What are tribal peoples and Native researchers saying about “evidence based-practices” in their communities?
3. Find out about the movement for “practice-based evidence.” Where is it coming from, and is it gaining traction?
4. Do research on historical trauma. What is the current generation doing to overcome its negative impact? What positive movements are afoot in Indian country to promote healing?
5. Find out what past Circles of Care grantees are doing. What happened in communities who participated in the initiative? What was the impact of participation?