

A Gift

It has been said that there would come a time when there would be those born who would look different, and with these differences they would carry a message that would change the people.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and related conditions of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder have produced some of the most devastating effects impacting Native peoples within the twentieth century. Producing a spectrum of issues ranging from infant death to developmental, physical, cognitive and emotional delays that may be manifested in low self-esteem, learning difficulties, physical anomalies, impulsivity and poor judgment, FAS and related conditions are 100 percent preventable. However, just imparting this knowledge is not enough. We know so much. We have collected a large amount of information about the problem. We even know the solution. What we lack are the appropriate vehicles to get us to, or even effectively facilitate, these solutions. We must create an awareness that re-teaches and reinforces the knowledge taught by our ancestors that a child is a sacred gift. We must recognize that there are many among us whose lives are already impacted and for whom interventions will result in prevention for future generations. For our children and the parents of our children who are already affected, we must move beyond blame and gloom and doom to demonstrate interventions that successfully utilize the strengths of these individuals. We must also promote holistic healing through traditional, developmentally appropriate techniques that address the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of individuals affected by an FASD integrating service provider and "natural helper community systems". In this way, we must integrate traditional and clinical knowledge, filling our basket with tools of help borne of past and present generations.

But, Fetal Alcohol is not just an Indian problem. Some other ethnicities and cultures produce even higher incidences of Fetal Alcohol. Indian country has just had the louder voice, having taken the lead on addressing prenatal exposure to alcohol many years ago. So, this is something of which to be proud and, something to remember. We have been given a gift and like all gifts, its abundance will be proportional to our ability to carry and share its riches. We can understand that there are those among us as teachers and we need to learn what they have to say. We will be better for our listening, not just because it will address our alcohol and drug use, but also because in learning to hear and respond to what they have to say, we are called upon to practice our values of compassion, patience, tolerance and generosity of spirit. We are rewarded by the beautiful generosity of theirs. With this dance of reciprocity, as communities we can weave the resilience that moves us all beyond shame and blame, gloom and doom, to the light of engendered hope and delivered promise.