



# Spotted Bull Recovery Resource Center: Integrating Cultural Practices Into Prevention and Treatment

Catching Up With COSSUP, October 2023

*This article shines a spotlight on the [Spotted Bull Recovery Resource Center](#) (SBRRRC) in Poplar, Montana, focusing on three aspects of its substance use prevention and treatment program that serve as beacons for organizations evolving their practices and serving their communities.\**

SBRRRC has served the Fort Peck Reservation communities for several decades with an organizational mission to provide opportunities for individuals and families to find a healthy lifestyle. Its vision is to help lead the community in an innovative way so that community members can walk in balance. SBRRRC's focus is to prevent and treat substance use among youth and adults by strengthening their overall wellness, engaging in cultural practices, and hosting intergenerational and outdoor events. The mission and vision are supported by the following core value statements: (1) We respect and value the dignity of our people and their lives; (2) We build integrity and establish responsibility for our clients; and (3) We rely on a higher power to guide and provide a critical and cultural foundation for treatment.

SBRRRC prides itself on providing individualized, comprehensive, and culturally based chemical dependency services. These include early intervention, outpatient treatment, aftercare, and a medication-assisted treatment (MAT) program. The model of treatment utilized is a multidisciplinary team approach. SBRRRC provides clinical treatment leveraging a variety of approaches, including chemical dependency treatment, family counseling, psychology, social work, and spiritual leadership. Its innovativeness is manifested in the integration of cultural practices and evidence-based approaches, and there is much to be learned from its success.

*\*Many thanks to Courage Crawford, Grant Development Specialist at SBRRRC, for providing information about the program.*

This grantee spotlight highlights three aspects of SBRRRC's work in particular: its emphasis on positive risk behaviors for youth, cultural practices, and developing community partnerships.



*The Spotted Bull Recovery Resource Center engages youth in a horsemanship clinic, bronco rides, prayer rides, and other activities designed to serve as healthy alternatives to substance use.*

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## **HIGHLIGHT 1: Involve youth in culturally specific, positive, healthy risk-taking behaviors to reduce their involvement with substance use.**

Promoting healthy risk-taking behaviors is designed to prevent substance use among youth by encouraging them to engage in positive and beneficial activities that provide a sense of excitement and challenge. The idea behind this prevention strategy is to redirect the natural inclination of young individuals for novelty and excitement toward activities that have positive outcomes and benefits for their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. By promoting healthy risk-taking behaviors, health care practitioners hope to reduce the appeal of experimenting with harmful substances.

SBRRRC engages youth in a Creator's Game horsemanship clinic, bronco rides, prayer rides, and competitive relays that include running, horseback riding, and canoeing. Key elements of promoting healthy risk behaviors to prevent substance use in youth include the following:

*Education and awareness:* Providing young individuals with comprehensive education about the potential risks and consequences of substance use is crucial. This includes highlighting the short-term and long-term impacts of drug use on physical health, mental health, academic performance, and social relationships.

*Positive alternatives:* Offering a wide range of positive, stimulating, and challenging activities can steer young people away from risky behaviors. These activities may include sports, arts, volunteer work, adventure programs, outdoor activities, leadership opportunities, and community involvement.

*Building resilience:* Empowering youth with skills to cope with stress, peer pressure, and life challenges can enhance their resilience. Resilient individuals are better equipped to resist negative influences, including substance use.

*Supportive environment:* Creating a supportive and nurturing environment where young people feel valued, understood, and respected is essential. Positive role models, mentors, and strong relationships with parents and educators can help shape healthy behaviors.

*Fostering decision-making skills:* Teaching youth how to make informed and responsible decisions is critical.

Strengthening their decision-making skills can enable them to avoid impulsive choices, including drug experimentation.

*Celebrating achievements:* Recognizing and celebrating youth achievements in positive endeavors reinforces their commitment to healthy risk-taking activities. This positive reinforcement can boost self-esteem and encourage continued engagement in constructive behaviors.

*Media literacy:* Learning media literacy skills can help young individuals critically analyze and understand the portrayal of substance use in various forms of media. By being aware of the manipulative aspects of certain media messages, youth can make more informed choices. SBRRRC engages heavily in social media outreach for youth.

*Collaboration and involvement:* Engaging young people in the planning and implementation of prevention programs empowers them and increases their ownership of the initiatives. Collaborating with youth helps ensure that prevention efforts are relevant and resonate with their interests and needs.

Ultimately, the goal is to create a nurturing environment that encourages positive, fulfilling, culturally relevant activities and empowers young people to make healthy choices for themselves, thereby reducing the appeal of risky behaviors such as substance use.

## **HIGHLIGHT 2: Listen deeply to the needs of the community and engage community members in culturally based activities.**

Culturally attuned practices play a crucial role in preventing or treating substance use. Native American communities nurture unique cultural values, beliefs, and traditions that are deeply intertwined with individuals' overall well-being, including their approaches to health and healing. Incorporating these cultural elements into prevention and treatment efforts can significantly enhance their effectiveness and relevance. At SBRRRC, examples of community activities include equine work, sweat lodges, naming ceremonies, vision quests, celebratory quilt work, buffalo harvests, and drum making.

*Cultural identity and connection:* Culturally attuned practices help individuals maintain and strengthen their cultural identity and connection to their heritage. By embracing traditional values and teachings, individuals are

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more likely to feel a sense of belonging, purpose, and pride, which can serve as protection against substance use.

*Healing and balance:* Native cultures often view health as a state of balance and harmony within the individual and the community. Traditional healing practices, such as ceremonies, rituals, and storytelling, address the holistic needs of a person—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. These practices can serve as alternatives to substance use and as coping mechanisms and can provide healthier ways to navigate life's challenges.

*Community support and involvement:* Culturally attuned practices involve the entire community in prevention and treatment efforts. This community-based approach creates a supportive environment that promotes accountability, encouragement, and a shared responsibility for each individual's well-being. It fosters a sense of togetherness, reducing feelings of isolation and the risk of turning to illicit substances for solace.

*Resilience and coping skills:* Traditional practices often emphasize resilience, coping skills, and problem-solving techniques that have been passed down through generations. These skills are valuable tools for addressing the root causes of substance use and dealing with life's difficulties without resorting to addictive behaviors.

*Cultural knowledge and wisdom:* Elders and traditional healers in Native American communities hold valuable cultural knowledge and wisdom. By incorporating their insights into prevention and treatment strategies, younger individuals can benefit from the wisdom of their ancestors and gain a deeper understanding of the consequences of substance use.

*Empowerment and self-efficacy:* Culturally attuned practices empower individuals by recognizing their strengths and potential. This sense of empowerment helps build self-efficacy—the belief in one's ability to overcome challenges—which can be instrumental in resisting peer pressure and making healthier choices regarding substance use.

## **HIGHLIGHT 3: No organization can do this alone—develop partnerships with other community agencies.**

SBRRRC believes that the partnerships it has created with different tribal departments have contributed to the

tremendous success of its endeavors. Examples of partner agencies include the Indian Health Service, the agriculture department at Fort Peck Community College, Fort Peck Health Department, and Native Connections. SBRRRC's partnership with Nakoda Dakota Oyate Youth Council is a vital part of its leadership-building program. The program seeks out youth leaders from each school on the reservation, encouraging them to work together to help solve current youth issues.

Developing partnerships with other agencies is crucial in the fight against addiction because of the multifaceted nature of the problem and its impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Addiction is not just a health issue; it intertwines with social, economic, and legal consequences. Collaboration between agencies can create a comprehensive and cohesive approach to the various dimensions of addiction.

Combating addiction requires a range of services, including prevention, treatment, counseling, mental health support, and social reintegration. No single agency can provide all these services alone. By collaborating, agencies can pool their expertise, funding, and other resources to create a more comprehensive and integrated system that addresses all aspects of addiction. This integrated approach can lead to better outcomes for individuals seeking help in the broader community.

Partnerships help facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building. Each agency may have specialized expertise and experience in different areas related to addiction, and through collaboration, they can share best practices, research findings, and innovative strategies. This knowledge exchange enables agencies to learn from each other, improve their services, and stay up to date with the latest developments in addiction treatment and prevention.

Partnerships enhance community engagement and support. Addiction affects not just the individuals struggling with substance abuse but also their families, friends, and the entire community. Partnering with local organizations, government agencies, and community groups results in a greater likelihood of gaining community trust and understanding the unique needs and challenges faced by the population. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among stakeholders, leading to greater community support for addiction prevention and recovery efforts. SBRRRC is developing its criminal justice partnerships to

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expand its support for juvenile justice, as well as to expand its outreach to schools. SBRRRC develops and supports peer mentors using the model of Native Pride, which emphasizes individuals' responsibility to be good relatives to each other.

**Looking forward:** SBRRRC has plans to expand into the provision of inpatient services, increase the number of people it serves through its MAT program, and continue to expand the scope of its behavioral health services. SBRRRC recognizes the need for holistic care and continues to build its program as a one-stop-shop for behavioral health needs (e.g., mental health and substance use).

*Readers interested in learning more about recovery resource centers may contact the National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC) of Fox Valley Technical College at (855) 866-2582 or [info@ncjtc.org](mailto:info@ncjtc.org). NCJTC's mission is to equip criminal justice professionals and service providers with the right training and tools to effect lasting and meaningful change in their communities. As a leading national criminal justice training organization, NCJTC delivers high-quality innovative training, expert instruction, and technical assistance solutions for combating prevailing public safety, wellness, and community challenges. NCJTC tailors training and technical assistance (TTA) to support tribal, rural, and under-resourced communities and understands the importance of meeting unique needs, rather than a "one size fits all" approach. Through BJA funding, NCJTC provides specialized TTA to support tribal COSSUP grantees, Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation Purpose Area 3 grantees, and other tribal communities in implementing justice-system-wide, community-based, culturally driven, and trauma-informed responses to alcohol and substance misuse.*

