

Hello, my name is Cheryl Teller. I am the new Community Educator for the Sexual Assault/Rape Prevention Education Program at Ama Doo Alchini Bighan, Inc. (A.D.A.B.I.). I have been employed with the program for six months. It has been a very exciting and interesting few months since I've been with ADABI and the RPEP program. I have learned and gained so much in a short amount of time. Although I am not up to speed with the legacy, it is a great experience to learn new things as the days go by. At times I struggle with getting the education message of rape prevention out, but I seem to overcome the issues with help from the other ADHS-funded agencies.

It has been taking a great deal of time researching the Chinle Agency and Navajo Nation Laws and statistics. I plan on continuing to provide Rape Prevention and Education for the rural schools as well as the local community if I get adequate support from the community. I plan on building a stronger relationship with the school districts so that we might be able to overcome the negative effects of living in rural areas. The positive solution is to provide these schools with the tools of an effective prevention program and emphasize to the teens that there are safe schools that promote student involvement. Rural areas need and deserve the same attention and focus as urban areas.

During the next few weeks we are planning on doing several activities on speaking out against Sexual Assault. I have collaborated with a Youth Council called "Horizons Unlimited Youth Council," a group of students from Chinle High School called SADD, and the Department of Youth/Youth Opportunity. Other organizations are involved as well in helping with activities.

The change in cultural aspects of the teachings here on the reservation are relatively different from other rural communities. We find barriers as far as getting consent forms signed by parents and guardians and actually having the youth speak out on this type of awareness. I do plan on breaking this barrier and finding different ways to go about presenting.

### ***Navajo Cultural Diversity of Educating and Raising Awareness on Sexual Assault and Rape Prevention***

The pre-judgment and emphasis of cultural norms play a major influence on our programs approach with each of our presentations. Here on our reservation when we talk about age appropriate presentations we also have to understand and be knowledgeable of age sensitive issues due to cultural diversity among one generation to the next. What we mean by age sensitivity is our community members are unique in culture even though a majority live the lifestyle of modern society and a percentage still practice a lifestyle that is appropriate to the traditional boundaries of culture.

This presents difficulty in presenting before a group of elders on the issues of sexual assault and rape prevention. It is a major task because within our culture this subject should not be spoken of or discussed in public. As a community educator, there are times when you will encounter a traditionalist who will be determined to have you viewed as sinister for your effort to raising awareness of sexual assault and rape prevention. The following are two examples of reasons why we can't talk about this issue in public.

*One example.* A community elder's disposition was that we are not suppose to speak of subject and issues of sexuality because our father sun, mother earth and the holy spirits are listening and surrounding us during the day-time. Negative issues and protection effort should only be implemented in the absence of these sacred beings. Even human sexuality was not supposed to occur in their presence of the daylight.

*Second example.* The traditional Navajo principles in cultural origin stories, the evolution of human violence, and sexual chaos has at one time occurred and has been prevalent since. This was a time where disagreement and division of sexes happened and the females relocated across a river from the males. This was an incident that would challenge and test the human survival skills and sexuality of both genders. During the time of separation, the events of sexual assault, rape and behavior of sexual self-mutilation occurred among both genders. Traditionalists believe that since then the evolution of sexual assault and rape had evolved. For that reason it was considered that it should be ignored or the discussion of it would by natural law suggest its reoccurrence. This where the perspective from example one is observed where the creators and spirits are watching and listening and discussion of this issue in inappropriate before them.

So when we discuss this problematic behavior we are viewed as bringing about negative spiritual influences and offenses to our culture despite the fact that these incidents occurred long ago. This same explanation is implied when parents refuse to sign the consent form, it is due to the natural law that children are harmed even more then protected by certain information. They say it is sick, nasty and disturbing to a young child because they are still developing and growing.

So we decided to visit a traditional practitioner, he suggested several approaches that might alter and make it more appropriate for our audience. But he said that he does agree that this is the old ways of teaching and it was never clearly stated why but forced directly upon our elders to live by and to pass on to their families. His recommendation was to give examples of how modern elements and diseases also handicap and disorient our people could be viewed as the same elements or evil monsters identified within our origin stories. Nayaah is character or element that implies negative force that bring about disabilities that destroy healthy living. And our efforts will be presented as "Nabahah" the protector and defender against such evil forces that had evolve and exist today. It is very important to identify with the origin stories because this will allow us to connect and gain respect from our elders. This advice will be taken and implemented to show our self-respect and cultural self-identity.

We hope that we have shared some cultural education with our reader when it comes to presenting for our Navajo people. We also understand that all community educators have probably experienced some type of similar cases or incidents within their work as well. The timing and tactics of presenting is very important before a challenge or criticism occurs. We have managed to make the adjustments and accommodations to limit ourselves from disputes and frustrations for our audiences.