

A feasibility evaluation of the urban native youth leaders program

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Abstract:

Urban American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth represent a unique and growing population in the United States. Culture and participation in cultural activities is associated with resilience; however, urban AI/AN youth often report limited access to their culture. This paper presents results from a mixed-method feasibility evaluation of the Native Youth Leaders (NYL) program, a culturally-grounded youth program for urban AI youth. The NYL feasibility evaluation sought to answer two questions: (1) is the NYL program feasible and appropriate and (2) what are urban AI youth perspectives on the NYL program? Results indicate the NYL program was feasible and appropriate for urban AI youth. Recommendations may be useful to other tribal organizations as they design and implement culture-based programs for urban AI youth.

Keywords: American Indian youth | Alaska Native youth | cultural activities | Native Youth Leaders (NYL) program | culture-based programs

Article:

Introduction

More American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth live in urban locations today than reservation locations. As a population, 70% of AI/ANs live in urban locations (Norris, Vines, & Hoeffel, 2012), and 58% of Native youth between the ages of 15-19 years live in urban areas (Urban Indian Health Institute [UIHI], 2009). The distinction of urban versus reservation AI/AN youth is important because it often determines the level of access youth have to cultural activities, relatives and extended family members, and ceremonial activities (Brown, Dickerson, & D'Amico, 2016).

Cultural identification and access to cultural activities can be partially explained by the movement of AI/AN groups from ancestral homelands to urban U.S. locations. Prior to colonization, AI/AN groups were thriving, healthy, and connected to their culture with distinct languages, traditions, ceremonies, and geographies. However, beginning in the 19th Century, the U.S. government began massive efforts to eliminate AI/AN peoples and their culture. The

Boarding School era and the 1887 Dawes Act forced AI/ANs to assimilate to mainstream culture. Boarding school policies prohibited use of Native languages and forced the removal of children from their homes (Sandefur, 1989). Many AI/AN children were subject to sexual, physical, emotional, and spiritual abuses at boarding schools. In 1956 the U.S. government developed the Indian Relocation Program, designed to move AI/ANs from reservations to cities (Burt, 1986). Many AI/AN populations were forced to move from their ancestral homelands onto reservations or undesirable locations (Sandefur, 1989). Forced relocation programs have ended, yet many AI/AN families are still forced to leave their homes and relatives in search of improved opportunities for employment, education, housing, and health care. Although some AI/AN families have adjusted to urban life, others have not. Researchers report that urban AI/ANs are twice as likely as the general population to be poor, unemployed, and not have a college degree (Castor et al., 2006). These disparities are compounded by the loss of culture, limited access to traditions and ceremonies, loss of family support, and loss of kinship systems (Johnson & Tomren, 1999). Urban AI/AN youth experience cultural stressors with regard to discrimination and cultural disruption (Hawkins, Cummins, & Marlatt, 2004) with limited access to mental health services and social support systems. The current system of care does not fully support their mental health and service system needs (West, Williams, Suzukovich, Strangeman, & Novins, 2012).

Cultural stressors, unmet mental health needs, and trauma place urban AI/AN youth at greater risk for substance use, poor mental health, suicide, violence, unintentional injuries, and school violence (Witko, 2006). As a group, they also have a higher prevalence of substance use, earlier onset, more severe substance related consequences, and less perceived risk from harm related to substances when compared with non-Native youth (Lawrence, Pamepl, & Mollborn, 2014; Rutman, Park, Castor, Taulii, & Forquera, 2008). More than 30% of urban AI/AN youth live in poverty, and 23% of AI/AN urban youth between the ages of 15-19 are not enrolled in school, compared with 15% of white youth (UIHI, 2009). Unintentional injury rates are also higher among urban AI/AN youth, with the majority of deaths related to motor vehicle crashes (UIHI, 2009). Participation in culture-based programming in urban settings may build resiliency in urban AI/AN youth and alleviate disparities.

Culture-Based Programming

An emerging body of literature describes the role of culture and participation in cultural activities as an integral aspect of building resilience and reducing risk factors in AI/AN youth (Yu & Stiffman, 2007; LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006). Resilience is defined as a positive adaptation despite adversity (Luthar, 2005). Protective models are often associated with cultural resiliency programming, where a resiliency factor (culture and cultural connections) moderates or reduces the effects of a risk factor (Kelley, Small, Small, Montileaux, & White, 2018). Previous studies of urban AI youth report that identification with their culture and participation in cultural activities is associated with resilience (LaFromboise et al., 2006). Participation in culture-based programs is thought to build resilience through social, emotional, psychological, and physical strengths (Kaufman et al., 2007; Snowshoe, Crooks, Tremblay, Craig, & Hinson, 2015). Research suggests that community-driven, culturally grounded prevention interventions, derived from the beliefs and values of a given tribe or culture, appear to be more acceptable and potentially more effective for AI/AN youth than evidence based practices (EBPs) developed with non-Native populations (Gone & Calf Looking, 2011). Kulis, Ayers, and Harthun (2017) adapted the Living in 2 Worlds substance use prevention curriculum for urban AI middle school students. This culturally-adapted curriculum was effective in

delaying initiation and reducing substance use. Other examples of culture-based prevention programs include the Journeys of the Circle Project (Marlatt et al., 2003), the HAWK2 program (Raghupathy & Forth, 2012), and the Motivational Interviewing and Culture for Urban Native American Youth (Dickerson, Brown, Johnson, Schweigman, & D'Amico, 2016). With the limited number of culture-based programs for urban AI youth, and the emerging body of literature that indicates such programs may be effective, feasibility evaluations are needed to explore culture-based programming for urban AI youth (Donovan et al., 2015).

Feasibility evaluations represent pieces of the research process that are completed before the main study or program begins. Characteristics of feasibility evaluations include assessment of recruitment capability and sample characteristics, testing data collection and outcome measures, documenting resources needed, and preliminary evaluation responses from participants (Arain, Campbell, Cooper, & Lancaster, 2010; Orsmond & Cohn, 2015). Previous studies with AI youth examined feasibility and acceptability by tracking participant recruitment, attendance, and conducting qualitative interviews with facilitators and youth about the implementation process (Goodkind, Lanoue, Lee, Freeland, & Freund, 2012). Other researchers have used feasibility studies to culturally tailor evidence-based interventions for multi-tribal and urban communities (Le & Gobert, 2015; Daley et al., 2018) or to test interventions designed for other populations with AI youth populations (Bowen, Henderson, Harvill, & Buchwald, 2012). A common theme found in these feasibility studies is that they use a community based participatory research (CBPR) orientation.

The primary aim of this feasibility evaluation was to explore whether the Native Youth Leaders (NYL) program, a culturally-based prevention program for urban AI youth, was feasible and appropriate. Consistent with this aim, we developed two questions:

1. Is the NYL program feasible and appropriate for use with urban AI youth?
2. What are urban AI youth perspectives on the NYL program?

Planning and Conceptualizing Native Youth Leaders for Urban American Indian Youth

A tribal consortium located in Montana facilitated the NYL. The tribal consortium is dedicated to improving health and data access, economic development, and education for tribes and their members through a variety of programs, policy recommendations, and meetings. The NYL program was based on the assumption that urban AI youth are exposed to a variety of cultures in urban settings, and these cultures define and shape their Native identities.

The NYL team includes one director, one cultural specialist, one cultural activity facilitator, and one evaluation scientist. This program was supported by a grant from a public university who received National Institutes of Health funding to build tribal research capacity in Montana.

Following a CBPR approach, the tribal consortium formed a community planning committee (CPC; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003) in October 2016. The committee was comprised of representatives selected by the consortium staff based on their involvement with urban AI youth. These individuals represented the hospital and local clinic, a Native youth non-profit, a youth empowerment organization, correction officers, the conservation corps, tribal elders, and school district representatives. The CPC met several times to discuss potential interventions for urban AI youth. The CPC also shared information about the kinds of cultural interventions and experiential activities that have been implemented in the past. Data provided by the CPC was used to inform planning efforts. Planning efforts and meetings continued until September 2017 when the NYL received additional funding to implement cultural activities for urban AI youth.

The NYL consisted of three activities. Activities were developed with input from the CPC, funding agency, urban AI youth, and tribal leaders. Initially the NYL team planned for eight activities, but due to a change in project directorship, difficulty in scheduling equine facilities, and time constraints, only three activities were possible. Concepts used to develop NYL activities were based on the Northern Plains history and culture. Activities incorporated the values of belonging, responsibility, generosity, respect for elders, shared responsibilities, and spirituality. These values were responsive to multiple tribes represented in the urban AI setting and included the following Northern Plains Indian culture activities: Lodge Ways, horse culture, and traditional arts and crafts. Activities were designed to expose youth to AI values, teachings, arts, and histories while building resiliency and cultural connections.

- Activity 1: Building life skills and working as a team, traditional arts and crafts, and honoring others. Sharing circle. Sharing meal.
- Activity 2: Horsemanship, painting horses using a variety of symbols, designs, and colors that reflect AI culture and ways of life. Sharing circle. Sharing meal.
- Activity 3: Painting of teepees, honoring elders, Lodge Ways, and circle of life. Sharing circle. Sharing meal.

Methods

Evaluation Design

We used a convergent design to combine qualitative and quantitative data collected during the NYL program (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). We compared qualitative themes with quantitative results to document the feasibility of NYL (Fetters et al., 2013; Saint Arnault & Fetters, 2011). Evaluations, surveys, and focus group data allowed us to focus on the feasibility and appropriateness of the NYL, and youth perspectives. The design included the following data sources: Cultural Connectedness Short Scale (n = 9; Snowshoe et al., 2015), focus group responses (n = 10), a completed evaluation form (n = 10), and written post-it-note responses from youth participants.

Theory

The framework underpinning NYL was orthogonal cultural identification theory, which states that culture is orthogonal, and identification with the minority or majority culture can be a source of personal and social strength (Oetting & Beauvais, 1991). This theory supported the creation of NYL based on the concept that AI culture can be protective and build resiliency in AI youth.

Recruitment

To be eligible for the NYL, youth had to self-identify as AI/AN (or mixed race that includes AI/AN), be ages 13-18 years, be in grades 7-12 at the time of recruitment, be able to understand spoken and written English, have transportation to and from sessions, and be able to provide a regular phone contact number. Urban AI youth were recruited from public middle and high schools from the urban location. The CPC recommended using fliers to recruit students from local schools and assisted with recruitment by telling their colleagues about NYL. Fliers

were also posted at CPC partner locations and other locations (local schools and YMCA) frequented by urban AI youth.

The initial recruitment goal was to identify 20 students for the NYL evaluation. Based on previous studies, a 50% attrition rate was expected, and we wanted to have at least 10 students in the core NYL group. The recruitment efforts resulted in 10 urban AI youth. The NYL followed all ethical standards for the population based on federal and tribal consortium requirements for feasibility evaluations. The Rocky Mountain Tribal Institutional Review Board reviewed the NYL feasibility evaluation and determined it was exempt. Consent was obtained from all individual participants. Parental consent was granted prior to participants attending the first cultural activity.

Sample

In this section we summarize NYL data collection instruments: Cultural Connectedness Short Scale (CCSS; Snowshoe et.al, 2015), focus group, NYL evaluation, and written post-it-notes.

Cultural Connectedness

Youth completed the CCSS (Snowshoe et al., 2015), a 11-item instrument that has been used in populations of urban AI youth. Six questions were “yes” or “no” response (e.g., I know my cultural/spirit/Indian name). Five statements assessed student level of agreement about cultural connectedness (e.g., I have a strong sense of belonging to my tribe or nation), using a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. The CCSS was administered to participants at the beginning of the first cultural activity.

Focus Group

Youth sat in a circle and participated in a focus group that was facilitated by a trained member of the NYL team. Focus group questions explored youth perceptions of cultural opportunities for AI youth in the urban location. The focus group occurred at the end of the third cultural activity. Discussion questions included:

1. If you could describe Native youth cultural opportunities in this urban community in just a few words, what would you say?
2. What types of issues and topics should NYL address?
3. Are there opportunities for us (the tribal consortium) to partner with other programs and organizations in the urban community? If so, which organizations?

NYL Evaluation

The NYL evaluation form consisted of 12 questions and was designed to assess youth perspectives about the NYL program with a focus on process, outcomes, and future efforts. The first question asked about age. The next two questions were open text response and asked, “How did you hear about the NYL program?” and “What did you want to get out of the NYL program?” The next set of questions asked youth to rate activities using a 5-point Likert type scale where 1 = Terrible and 5 = Very Good. The next question asked youth, “Is there a need for the NYL program in this city?” Response options were Yes, No, or Not Sure. The next questions were open text response and focused on the NYL process: “What went well?”, “What did not go so well?”, “What difference did the NYL project make?”, and “Did you get what you wanted out of the NYL project?” The next two questions asked, “Would you consider doing this again?” and “Would you recommend NYL to your friends?” Response options were Yes, No, or Not Sure.

The final question was open response and asked youth, “Can you think of three things big or small that would make NYL better?”

Post-it-Note Activity

Youth received different colored post-it-note stickers and were asked to respond to the following questions: “What text message would you send someone who wants to know more about NYL?” and “What is something that you liked, not sure, and did not like about NYL?” The NYL evaluation and post-it-note activity were completed at the end of the third cultural activity.

Analysis

Quantitative data from the CCSS and evaluation forms were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS Version 24.0. Qualitative data from open text evaluation responses and focus groups were transcribed by the authors; post-it notes were photographed during the meeting and transcribed by the authors. All qualitative data were analyzed using NVIVO Software version 11.0 (QSR, 2000). Results were validated by the NYL team and youth participants.

Findings

Urban AI youth participating in NYL were from two tribes located in the Rocky Mountain Region. All urban AI youth were male, and average age was 14.3 years ($SD = 1.80$, range 12-18). During the first activity, nine youth attended; at the second activity, 10 youth attended; and at the third activity, 10 youth attended.

Cultural Connectedness

CCSS responses indicate that urban AI youth are moderately connected to their culture. Table 1 summarizes urban AI youth NYL CCSS responses. Nearly all urban AI youth answered “yes”, they or someone they are close to use sage, sweat grass, or cedar. More than half of urban AI youth report they have been given an Indian name and have an elder or traditional person that they talk to. Forty-four percent of urban AI youth believe that in certain situations, animals and rocks have a spirit. More than one-third of urban AI youth understand some of their traditional language and use tobacco for guidance. The next five statements were based on a level of agreement where 1 = Disagree and 5 = Agree. Mean scores for these statements indicate that urban AI youth reported “neither,” a mean score of “3,” for all statements. This score indicates that urban AI youth do not feel strongly about the CCSS statements presented.

Evaluation Responses

Ten youth completed the NYL evaluation, although youth did not answer all questions. Most youth heard about the NYL from study staff members or friends. Youth responses varied with regard to what they wanted to get out of NYL. Most wanted to learn life skills, how to be a better person, inspiration, or knowledge about their Native culture. Most youth felt the length of activities was okay ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .88$), food was good ($M = 4.22$, $SD = .83$), and gifts were good to very good ($M = 4.55$, $SD = .72$). Youth ratings of cultural activities varied. Youth rated the first meeting on teamwork as okay to good ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .86$). Horsemanship and culture was the focus of the second meeting, and youth rated this as good to very good ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .86$). The third activity included teachings on the Lodge Ways and painting teepees, and youth

rated this as okay to good ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.05$). When responding to the question, “Do you think there is a need for NYL in this city?”, six youth said yes and three youth were not sure.

Table 1
CCSS Short Scale Responses Urban Youth

CCSS Statements (Yes or No Response)	Urban (n)
I have been given an Indian name, %	55.5 (5)
I can understand some of my traditional language, %	33.3 (3)
In certain situations, I believe things like animals and rocks have a spirit, %	44.4 (4)
I use tobacco for guidance, %	33.3 (3)
I (or someone I am close with) use sage, sweet grass, or cedar, %	88.8 (8)
I have an Elder or traditional person that I talk to, %	55.5 (5)
CCSS Statements (5-Point Scale, Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)	Urban Mean
I have spent time trying to find out more about being Native such as my history, traditions, and customs.	3.11 (SD = 1.97)
I have a strong sense of belonging to my community or Nation.	3.44 (SD = .95)
I feel a strong attachment towards my community or Nation.	3.33 (SD = .94)
The eagle feather has a lot of meaning to me.	3.22 (SD = 1.23)
I feel that I am in balance physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.	3.55 (SD = 1.06)

We asked youth, “What went well?” Text responses varied. Three youth wrote the horse culture activity; five youth wrote everything; and two wrote the food and gifts. One youth wrote, “Building new relationships with people and animals.” The next question we asked was, “What did not go so well?”, and five youth wrote the rope game. One youth wrote, “The rope game was hard to understand on how life goes.” These data were triangulated with responses from the post-it-note activity where 10 youth wrote they did not like certain aspects of NYL, and the most frequent response was the rope game ($n = 6$; see Table 2).

We asked youth, “What difference did the NYL program make?” Three youth wrote that getting to know one another was the difference, and others wrote it gave them a positive outlook on life and inspiration. One youth wrote, “I learned more about Native culture and why things are done the way that they are.” We asked youth, “Did you get what you wanted out of the NYL program?” Six youth wrote, “Yes,” two wrote, “Kind of,” and one youth wrote “No.”

We asked youth, “Would you consider doing this again?” Seven youth selected “Yes” and two selected “Not Sure.” When asked, “Would you recommend NYL to your friends?”, eight youth wrote “Yes,” and one wrote “No.” The last question asked youth to list three things big or small that would make the NYL study better. A total of 25 responses were analyzed. The most frequent response related to activities ($n = 6$), food and drink ($n = 5$), more people ($n = 4$), opportunities for group sharing ($n = 3$), location and facilities ($n = 2$), sports or basketball ($n = 2$), longer times and more weeks ($n = 1$), kids input ($n = 1$), and more gifts ($n = 1$).

Post-It Note Responses

Eight youth responded to the question, “What text message would you send someone who wants to know more about NYL?”

- #1. I would tell someone to come and find out more for themselves.
- #2. There's free stuff.
- #3. Food.
- #4. Projects and lunch.
- #5. There is a Native youth group going on.
- #6. It gives you something to do.
- #7. You learn about life and new Native perspectives on life. You do fun activities to learn about life.
- #8. Art.

Ten youth responded to the question, “What is something that you liked, not sure, and did not like about NYL?” Most responses were things that youth liked (n = 27), others not sure (n = 11), and did not like (n = 10). The food, cultural activities, and painting of teepees were the most frequently cited responses to what youth liked (see Table 2).

Table 2
Post-it-Note Responses

Like	Count	Not Sure	Count	Did Not Like	Count
Cultural Activities/Projects	6	Location	3	Rope game	6
Friends	2	Painting horses	2	Painting horses & Teepees	2
Horses	4	Food	2	Lunch	1
Food	7	I don't know	2	Couldn't locate restroom	1
Painting Teepees	6	Rope game	1		
Nothing	1	Adult with kids	1		
Gifts	1				
Total	27		11		10

Focus Group Responses

Urban Native Youth Cultural Opportunities

When asked, “If you could describe Native youth cultural opportunities in this urban community in just a few words, what would you say?”, youth responded by describing that school-based powwows and intertribal clubs at school were the only cultural opportunities for them.

Issues and Topics

We asked youth, “What types of issues and topics should NYL address?” One youth said that drugs and alcohol should be a focus area: “I see a lot of Native kids going down the wrong path and making bad decisions about drugs and alcohol.” Others mentioned leadership skills, study groups, healthy relationships, and small groups with both boys and girls (separate).

Opportunities to Partner

We asked youth, “Do you see opportunities for NYL to partner with other programs and organizations in the urban community? If so, which organizations?” Youth mentioned the local YMCA, basketball leagues, family services, community outreach organizations, churches, and the school-based intertribal clubs.

Discussion

This evaluation sought to explore the feasibility of urban AI youth culture-based programming and answer two questions: Is the NYL program feasible and appropriate for use with urban AI youth? And what are urban AI youth perspectives on the NYL program?

Urban AI youth have a unique set of life experiences and cultural challenges that must be considered in the development of culture-based programming (Kulis, et al., 2017; Marlatt, et al., 2003). Results from the NYL evaluation indicate that the majority of urban AI youth participated in some cultural activities or knew someone that did. And, despite being located in an urban location, urban AI youth could access cultural activities and had family members who were connected to their culture. More than half of the NYL youth participants had an Indian name. Previous research has found that when multiple generations live in an urban area, their connection to culture, spirituality, and traditions is more urbanized and secularized (Kulis, Hodge, Ayers, Brown, & Marsiglia, 2012), and culture-based programming should take these differences into account.

Findings from the NYL focus group and evaluation indicate that urban AI youth report a high-level of satisfaction with the program and enjoyed cultural activities. The high-level of satisfaction reported by urban AI youth is likely due to their involvement in planning NYL activities and the interactive nature of cultural activities. A CBPR approach lends itself to community involvement and helped guide the development and implementation process. This follows previous research, where the community-members are equal partners, with expertise and decision making roles (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). NYL participants rated the horsemanship and culture activity highest ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .86$). Most NYL participants ($n = 7$) wrote they would attend NYL again and recommend NYL to their friends ($n = 8$). These results are consistent with previous research that has found culturally-based programs are more acceptable than programs developed with non-Native populations (Gone & Calf Looking, 2011). Areas for improvement related to having additional cultural activities and more youth in attendance. Due to the limited amount of time and scheduling, only three cultural activities were possible—youth feedback about additional cultural activities indicates their desire to be involved in future culture-based programming. As culture-based programming grows, the reach and number of youth involved in activities will likely increase.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this evaluation that should be considered. First, all participants were male, and this was not intended. Differences in risk, protective factors, and cultural identification can be influenced by gender. Second, we explored culture-based programming using a small sample of urban AI youth who met three times over the course of two months. This limits the generalizability and application of our findings but does not diminish their importance. It is possible that additional activities and involvement in the project would have resulted in different results. Third, youth focus group responses were limited to the results of the qualitative analysis. A larger, more diverse group of urban AI youth may result in different qualitative themes about the best ways to engage urban AI youth in cultural activities and culture based programs. Last, the results of the NYL evaluation may be difficult to replicate in other communities because of the small number of youth participants and their distinct cultural background. Even with these limitations, the results of the NYL evaluation give us hope and direction for future work.

Recommendations

From this feasibility evaluation, there are recommendations that emerged that may be useful to the tribal consortium and other urban AI youth programs.

First, NYL documented the need for cultural activities that reach AI youth in this urban location. This was important since NYL youth reported they did not feel there were a lot of opportunities for cultural experiences. We learned that urban AI youth most often access cultural activities through school-based clubs and powwows, but school-based clubs that meet twice a month and annual powwows are not enough. The best ways to engage urban AI youth in cultural activities is to partner with existing community programs, schools, and services. The NYL participants felt that family services, churches, schools, and local gyms, like the YMCA, would be good partners for future efforts. Urban AI youth were not aware of specific programs for cultural activities in the urban location.

Second, every urban community and location is different, and these differences should be considered in the development and expansion of urban AI culture-based programming.

Community advisory boards and committees play an important role in bridging partnerships, documenting existing resources and activities, and disseminating information.

Third, urban AI youth could benefit from programming that addresses specific topics like drugs and alcohol, mental health, academic success, study groups, community service projects, and healthy relationships. Such programs and topics would need to be co-designed with the community advisory board, staff, and urban AI youth to ensure they were developmentally appropriate and responsive to youth needs.

Fourth, increasing the reach and diversity of urban AI youth involved in future culture based programs will add to the rich, cultural exchange that occurs when urban AI youth come together to share and learn about their culture.

Finally, in many urban locations there are AI centers or facilities dedicated to tribes in the region. These facilities are critical for urban AI youth and families because they serve as a hub for cultural exchange, cultural activities, ceremonies, sharing meals, and various cultural connections. However, in this urban location, and in many other urban locations throughout the United States, there are not AI centers or facilities. In the absence of such facilities, tribal consortiums, tribal leaders, and schools can help by providing funding, facilities, and support for urban AI youth culture-based programming.

Conclusion

The NYL feasibility evaluation is the first evaluation of an urban AI youth culture-based program in Montana. The approach and recommendations outlined in this paper may be useful to schools, tribal consortiums, urban American Indian Centers, funders, and policy makers in their efforts to design, implement, and advocate for culture-based programming in urban locations. Urban AI youth are a unique population with histories, traditions, and kinship systems that could benefit from future culture-based prevention programs. Documenting the feasibility of culture-based prevention programs is an important first step toward addressing substance use and mental health disparities in this population. Urban AI youth perspectives highlighted in this evaluation underscore the need for continued efforts that connect youth with their culture, values, kinship systems, and way of life. As one NYL youth participant said, “I learned more about Native culture and why things are done the way that they are.”

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