

I wish to thank you, for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Blueprint for Action and how it has benefited my community.

My name is Kirk Crow Shoe. I am Piegan, Blackfoot from Alberta, Canada. I currently serve the Native American community in the capacity of a Program Director for the Division of Indian work where I provide services to Native American boys in long-term foster care.

Native children are over represented in Minnesota's foster care system. While Native Americans make up 1.2 percent of Minnesota's population, they account for 12 percent of the children in the state's foster care system.

Our solution was to offer the community the Healing Spirit Program. While living at Healing Spirit, the boys, ages 13-18, focus on school, their culture and independent living skills. The program excels at connecting youth to their Native culture and community – a significant missing piece in their lives – and through that experience, these young men begin to believe in themselves and others. They have formed their own traditional drum group and receive invitations both locally and from across the nation to share their gifts.

Our youth are wounded, traumatized and disadvantaged from having been removed from their families of origin, having experienced multiple disruptions in placements and having been abused emotionally, physically and sexually. They are highly vulnerable to youth violence and gang affiliation as both perpetrators as well as victims.

A City of Minneapolis Youth Violence Prevention grant supported the Division of Indian Work to repatriate our youth with their community. Which enabled us to ensure the Blueprint's first goal that, ***“Every young person in Minneapolis is supported by at least one trusted adult in their family or their community.”*** Weekly group therapy sessions allow us to meet the Blueprint's second goal to ***“Intervene at the first sign that young people are at risk for violence.”*** Given their traumatized histories, our youth are more often than not, routed for delinquency placements. But we, in concert with Social Services and Juvenile Justice have been able to address the Blueprint's third goal to, ***“Restore young people who have gone down the wrong path.”*** Guiding our youth as they learn the values and traditions of their culture greatly aid us in achieving the Blueprint's fourth goal to, ***“Unlearn the culture of violence in our community.”***

We will pass through this life but one time, we will have one opportunity to make a stand for the well-being of the youth in my community. Having had the honor of serving as a Steering Committee member during the development of the Blueprint, I experienced firsthand the commitment and skill of my fellow Committee member's. The relationships that were formed during this time have and will continue to make a difference in the lives of youth in my community. For that I am both humbled and grateful.