

Testimony of Diana Yazzie Devine, President/CEO, Native American Connections

Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Regional Hearing March 14, 2020 at Talking Stick Resort, Scottsdale, AZ.

In 1972, a handful of Native American leaders – social workers, businessman, IHS employees, and community members – had a growing concern for people coming to the Phoenix area from tribal communities/reservations looking for employment and a safe place to stay; and instead many found that their agricultural, craft and rural job skills did not always match those in the City. There was a growing homeless population and an increasing number struggling with alcohol and drug addiction. *Indian Rehabilitation* (IR), now *Native American Connections* (NAC), was established to provide the growing Native American population help and support with their alcohol/drug recovery needs, provide a safe affordable place to live, and connect to jobs. Forty-eight (48) years later, Native American Connections still fulfills our Mission of “Improving lives of individuals and families with Native American culturally responsive health, housing and community development services”.

In 1979, Diana Yazzie Devine began working with Indian Rehabilitation, only the 3rd employee. IR/NAC was a single residential alcohol program for men that offered the 12-step peer recovery model, counseling for what we now know as trauma, and traditional Native healing practices including the Talking Circle and Sweat Lodge ceremonies. The program healing philosophy, over 40 years ago, was “*Healthy Mind, Body, Spirit, & Connection within the Community*”. Integrated health, social determinants of health, and wellness models are not new to Tribal people and Communities – just new names.

Client, Resident, and Community “voice” has always been the driver of new and expanded services, so NAC quickly realized that it was imperative to look at the whole person, whole family and our whole Community. It didn’t matter what immediate services individuals or families were seeking, they always where looking for more – sobriety leads to meaningful livable wage jobs, that leads to safe affordable housing, that leads to mentoring and leadership in the Community.

Native American Connections now serves over 10,000 people each year in 22 housing and service locations near Central Phoenix near jobs and services, good schools, along light rail and transportation centers, near sports and entertainment and cultural venues – and NAC provides our partners with numerous organizations to provide a comprehensive continuum of serves that allow people to access all aspects of a “*Health Community*”. Building a “*Community of Hope*”, NAC owns and operates over 1,000 units of low-income affordable housing for working families and permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals. In addition, NAC owns and operates the only emergency shelter and transitional housing program for homeless youth in all of Maricopa County. Grounded in substance use recovery, in 2016, NAC opened the newly constructed 70-bed residential treatment program – the *Patina Wellness Center* – open to men, women and their dependent children, and pregnant and parenting women. An additional 50 beds substance use recovery center is in construction called the *Phoenix Mountain Preserve Wellness Center*.

2020 projects are focused on housing for foster care youth transitioning out of the system, and ending Native veterans' homelessness in Maricopa County. NAC is actively involved in criminal justice reform, voter registration, and engaging the Community in an accurate Census.

Native American Connections and the Phoenix Indian Center (PIC) co-own and operate the 85,000 square foot office building *Native American Community Service Center* that houses a collaborative of 11 nonprofits including the Tohono O'odham Community Tribal College and Gila River Indian Community Urban Service Center. In 2017, NAC and PIC renovated the former Phoenix Indian School (1891-1990) elementary building and now operate the site as the *Phoenix Indian School Visitor Center*.

Native American Connections is committed to working on systemic change in areas that impact housing, healthcare, and community economic development. Currently, the government funds programs in silos, accounts for the funds in silos, and expects service delivery in silos; however, people and families have complex and multiple issues, and service delivery must be delivered across all areas of family and Community needs.