



'AIDS Wall of Moccasins' Memorial Enhances HIV Awareness in a Native Community

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"Beautiful and touching. We can see the loss in the steps which will not be taken, and at the same time, their footprints that will stay with us. So full of life and stillness." -Anonymous

To honor the memory of the twelve Menominee tribal members we have lost to AIDS...



These were our sons, our daughters... Our sisters and our brothers.

Menominee Tribal Clinic Menominee HIV/AIDS Program Menominee, Wisconsin



Our mothers, and our aunts... Our fathers and our uncles.



We are all, every one of us, touched by this loss.

INTRODUCTION

Rural Native American communities face great challenges in HIV prevention. Native persons may perceive themselves as being relatively low risk for acquiring HIV infection; therefore, underrating the need for HIV prevention in relationship to other health and economic disparities. Consequently, the Menominee Tribal Clinic, recognizing a need for HIV awareness and prevention created the Wall of Moccasins to remember those who died from HIV/AIDS. As a result of a number of AIDS related deaths among Menominee Nation tribal members, the tribal health clinic developed a meaningful way to integrate this loss into HIV education. Clinicians commissioned a pair of moccasins be made to memorialize each tribal member who died from HIV infection. These moccasins, now hanging on the wall as a permanent fixture in the clinic are dedicated, "To the memory of the twelve Menominee tribal members we have lost to AIDS. These were our sons, our daughters, our sisters and our brothers. Our mothers, our aunts, our fathers and our uncles. We are all, every one of us, touched by this loss..." The clinic uses the artistry and visual impact of the Wall of Moccasins to humanize those who died from AIDS, to break down HIV stereotypes, and to use as a teaching tool within their rural Native community.

EXPERIENCE

This project, initiated in 1997, enables the clinic to honor members of the Menominee Nation who have died from HIV/AIDS. The Wall of Moccasins recognizes tribal members who no longer "walk on this earth" with a pair of hand-made empty moccasins. Each pair is crafted to represent the Menominee Tribe with a woodland design; the smallest pair represents a young child who died.

BEST PRACTICES

The Wall of Moccasins has stimulated people on the reservation and neighboring communities to talk and think about HIV and its consequences. The moccasin artwork display has toured at local and regional health fairs, pow-wow's and World AIDS Day events. The 'Wall of Moccasins' has personalized the disease for community members and has helped to decrease denial and stigma about the risk of HIV/AIDS in the Menominee Nation.

"Being Native American, I feel we are typically ignored when it comes to health disparities, especially HIV. The wall made me feel happy that someone has tried to step up and try to show how we, too, have been affected by this disease." -Anonymous

CONCLUSIONS

The creation of traditional Native artwork serving as a memorial to people impacted by HIV/AIDS provides clinic staff with an educational tool to break down barriers in the community to participate in HIV awareness and prevention education. Identifying empty moccasins as a symbol of their loss enables the tribe to reduce stigma and inform the community about HIV infection in a culturally sensitive manner. This art display is a powerful visual reminder of the AIDS pandemic and serves as a call to action for the Native community to look beyond the stigmatized categories that cling to the popular image of AIDS. The Wall of Moccasins promotes a new prevention model for other tribes to integrate into their current AIDS awareness programming.

"For those that could have danced in these shoes...peace to you." -Anonymous

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mater The Midwest Learning Resource for HIV/AIDS Education and Prevention for Health Care Professionals and Organizations



Total HIV Cases*	Members Who Died from AIDS Complications*	Members Currently Living with HIV*	Members Currently Living with AIDS*
17	12	2	3

* As of Fall, 2005