

## Tell Us About It, Episode 9: Defining a Well Child in Taos Pueblo with SPIRIT full version

Susan Howley: Welcome to *Tell Us About It: Victim Research Convos*. A podcast from the Center for Victim Research, with support from the Office for Victims of Crime. On each episode of *Tell Us About It*, we talk to researchers and practitioners about their work, the tools being built for use in the field, and how we can work together to build an evidence base for victim services.

Today, we're talking with Po Chen, Executive Director of Youth Heartline, and Dr. Holly Scheib of Sage Consulting. Together, they form SPIRIT – supporting protection, integration and resources in tribes. Holly and Po, welcome, and could I ask you to each introduce yourself, and give a sentence or two about your background?

Holly Scheib: Sure. I'm Holly Scheib. I'm a Global Health and Community Resilience Consultant. My background includes research associate professor positions at Tulane and George Washington universities, and consulting experiences with universities and NGOs in the humanitarian context all over the world. I'm currently full-time as President of Sage Consulting, where we work to support technical capacity building in communities and organizations.

Po Chen: And I'm Po Chen. Thank you for having us. As you mentioned, I am Executive Director of Youth Heartline, which is a child advocacy non-profit in Taos, New Mexico. Our mission is to make life safer and better for vulnerable children and their families in our community. We are the only non-profit in our region to focus on serving children who have suffered abuse or neglect, and each year we provide essential services to over 250 children, youth, and adults. So, SPIRIT stands for Supporting Protection, Integration and Resources In Tribes. It was created based on my experience being Executive Director in Youth Heartline, and working with Taos Pueblo. There have been a number of issues that have come up regarding the interface of tribal child welfare, and state and federal child welfare laws and practices. That's been a theme over the five years that I've been at Youth Heartline in the Executive Director position. When the opportunity arose to pursue something more permanent or more intentional, I gave my friend Holly a call and asked if she wanted to work with me. Out of that, SPIRIT was born.

Susan Howley: Great. So, Holly and Po, SPIRIT was funded by the Center for Victim Research, to help you all undertake a partnership project with Taos Pueblo. Can you tell us briefly about your fellowship project and what you were trying to do?

Po Chen: Absolutely. As I mentioned, SPIRIT came out of years long of engagement with Taos Pueblo and experiencing some of the difficulties. The literature is rife with a lot of statistics and research talking about how Native children are overrepresented in the foster care system. They have typically much worse than average health outcomes and life outcomes. We were just looking to see if there was a way to actually address this, if we could research it, because there didn't seem to be a clear reason why this was the case, and if so, what to do about it.

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So, really the genesis of SPIRIT happened about two years ago, around a funding opportunity offered by the Administration of Children and Families, under the Children's Bureau. Looking through that, it just sort of came across my desk when we were looking for grant opportunities. The grant opportunity sort of highlighted the need and value of participatory methods. I had met Holly personally through personal connections a couple of years prior. So, we've had discussions, but never really had an opportunity to work together. This seemed the perfect opportunity, so I gave her a call. In developing that grant, that formed the basis of what's happening with the fellowship. So, in a lot of ways, there are a lot of moving parts. SPIRIT sort of was created for a different grant opportunity, but the fellowship really sort of materialized later that year. Since we were just starting to get this off the ground, and because the fellowship was really explicit in wanting to support initial budding partnerships, that seemed like a really great opportunity. So, we applied. We're so tickled that we received that support.

Susan Howley: Well, we've been so pleased to work with you. Now, we hear time and again, that success while participatory research is really determined by the level of trust between the community and the researchers, and the strength of that relationship. So, Po and Holly, can you tell us what sort of trust building, or relationship building did you do in this instance. Did you go into this project with a level of trust already established between you and the community? Or did you have to start from zero?

Po Chen: Well, thank you for that question, and I would absolutely agree that trust is critical for participatory research, for successful participatory research. I should clarify that our project isn't just a partnership between Holly and me, or between Sage and Youth Heartline, but between three entities: Sage Consulting, Youth Heartline and Taos Pueblo. The SPIRIT program, one of the key components of it was building trust across all three of the partners. So, creating a tri-lateral relationship. There are different types of trust, and different trust processes and different trust building activities that need to occur between each two partner group in that tri-lateral relationship. So, specifically, we have one type of trust between Youth Heartline and Taos Pueblo, another type between Sage and Youth Heartline, and a third type between Sage and Taos Pueblo.

So, together, all of this sort of potentially builds a fourth type of trust, that in the overall project. So, for the purpose of discussion, let's actually focus on those three individual trust relationships. So, I'll talk a little bit about Youth Heartline's trust relationship with Taos Pueblo, which is based on years of collaborative service delivery, our shared geography, and I should point out that although Taos Pueblo is a sovereign tribe, it is very much enmeshed in the greater Taos community. It's not remote, you can walk and be on tribal land. So it's very connected that way. We've also developed a program in partnership together. So, this was accomplished through years of active listening, committed partnership and meaningful collaboration.

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Holly Scheib: So, building on what Po has said, I'll talk a little bit about the trust relationship between Youth Heartline and Sage. So as Po said, we came into this as friends. Our personal relationship is a foundation in this, which I think helps set a strong, positive tone in all of our varied trust relationships in this project. So between the two of us, between Sage and Youth Heartline, first we're thought partners. We're thought partners in how we approach Taos Pueblo, meaning that together, we work to discuss activities, we think through all of the different relationships we have with the Pueblo and members of the Pueblo. Together we reflect on the history of Taos Pueblo. Part of that is, I'm able to understand Po's experiences, and his lessons learned with prior work, and that we're able to bring that into our ongoing experiences and discuss it, and continue to develop lessons learned through that. All of this builds our trust in each other. It's from all of those different types of relationships between us that we're able to work together to present a cohesive content when we work with the Pueblo. So we present ourselves as distinct entities, but also as a unit together when we work with the Pueblo.

In terms of Sage and Taos Pueblo, that was a separate form of trust that we had to build. So I had entree from Po, and by virtue of his work and relationships, but then also had to develop my own relationships with members of the tribe, and communities within the tribe. Po's background is my known touchstone, so even as we do workshops, and I lead as primary facilitator, Po is still physically there, which shows our relationship, and his commitment to me and his partnership with me in this. The fact that we represent these different and distinct bodies is really a model of partnership that we show to Taos Pueblo, and sets the stage for how we partner with them.

In terms of my trust building with the tribe, I use Patricia McGuire's work a lot in my own. In her writing of theory and praxis, she talks a lot about just enough trust, working with tribal communities. I find this informs my practice. So we work with honesty, we operate at a high level of self-awareness. We're very, very clear on intent and work hard to articulate the reasons for the work, and what each party involved seeks to gain. So, part of this too is we're clear that we'll never ever understand the experiences of the Taos Pueblo community. So we have to find an in between point to trust each other. That's really what we're working for with just enough trust. So the workshops we design are informed by all of these things, and influence what participatory techniques are used, and how we set the stage for their use.

Susan Howley: Great. Po, can you remind us, what types of information gathering activities were part of this partnership project?

Po Chen: So, information gathering really occurred in several stages. There are two levels of the work that we're doing through SPIRIT and the fellowship. The first layer is that we're interested in many ways sort of like intervention science. Sort of, how do we work collaboratively, and collaboratively intervene in underserved and vulnerable communities. How do we partner with them, how do we be

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good partners, and actually lead to lasting results. The second layer, which is layer that does not belong to us, this data, but instead to the community itself, is information generated around, for instance, tribal priorities, their cultural values, and how they want to implement that and how they want to develop indicators around child wellbeing.

Susan Howley: Po, can you tell us briefly about your fellowship project? What specifically were you all trying to do?

Po Chen: Through the construction of SPIRIT, we've identified that there are a lot of questions that we wanted to answer about, specifically about tribal child wellbeing. The fellowship offered a great opportunity to begin this work. As I mentioned, SPIRIT came out of a multi-year engagement with Taos Pueblo. It developed around a different grant opportunity, which we ended up not receiving. But the fellowship allowed us to take that initial first step. So we scaled back our original large, multi-year vision into something that could be accomplished in the nine months of the fellowship. The question that we were trying to answer at a fundamental level, that's going to set the baseline for future work, we hope, is identifying and describing what a thriving child looks like in the context of Taos Pueblo life, both culturally and on an everyday basis as they integrate within the wider state and local community.

So, in order to do this, we worked hard to convene two meetings with stakeholders. The first one, with people who work in fields touching child welfare, so tribal court, social services, community health and services. The second one with a group of youth to get their input, because in the past, what Holly and I identified as stumbling blocks for previous research projects, sort of seeking to understand this, is that a lot of that information was not actually solicited. It's difficult to talk about what needs to happen in terms of abuse and neglect, when we don't have a clear idea of what is the target. What is a thriving child.

Susan Howley: Right. I understand. That's a great focus to have, and I think a lot of people skip that step. So, when you two worked with the Taos Pueblo community to convene this first stakeholder meeting, and we've talked about the need to build trust, did you go into this meeting with the trust already built and feeling like now you can just jump into the work, or did you continue to incorporate trust building as you started the actual meeting with the stakeholders?

Po Chen: I think, well that's a really good question. I think that trust building doesn't even really stop. I find it interesting that in work environments, we talk about trust building, trust building exercises – we have this whole vocabulary about it. But it's almost completely absent in our own personal lives, with individual relationships. I don't know about you but I've never heard anyone say that they were scheduling trust building time with their spouse. Even with our own interpersonal relationships, we build trust all the time. We do this by being available, by being good listeners, and by following through on what we say we're going to

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do. So, institutional trust building, like between work entities and agencies, it has a lot of the same features, but with additional things that are overlaid on top of that. I also find it interesting that institutional trust building flows in really interesting ways.

So when we started to pitch SPIRIT, we first brought it to people at Taos Pueblo, whom I work with on a day to day basis. They saw the potential in it, and offered to use their own trust networks to get us meetings with their supervisors. We repeated the process, so on and so forth, each time moving up the leadership hierarchy. We were really serious about tailoring our presentations to the feedback that we received. So feedback prior to these presentations, during the presentations and afterwards, so that we could speak directly to the interests and needs. So we spoke to people higher and higher up, up the leadership hierarchy, until we spoke with the tribal administrator. It's really at this point that there was an inflection point.

It was a watershed, because after that, when we reached out to stakeholders for this meeting, we were granted a baseline level of trust, due to our relationship with the tribal administrator and also the stakeholders' relationship with the tribal administrator. So, however having earned this with the tribal administrator, still doesn't mean that trust building stops. I know that Holly will talk about the specific activities that are designed to build trust during these stakeholder workshops a little bit later.

Susan Howley: So Holly, can you tell us what sorts of activities did you do at the meeting of stakeholders to really promote full engagement of the participants.

Holly Scheib: Thank you, I'd love to tell you about this. So building on the foundation that Po has described – once we had approval for the fellowship, once we went through that really lengthy process of building our relationships with all these different parts of the tribe, we scheduled the first workshop with individuals who had direct experience, professional experience, parenting experience, et cetera, with tribal children. We chose our activities very purposely for this. So the SPIRIT process itself begins, as Po said, with communities defining their vision for child wellbeing, and then integrating this vision into child protection and child advocacy systems within the Taos Pueblo community, and with the various systems that interact with children from this community.

So the first thing we needed to do was to be able to answer questions that had been raised about the complexity of the New Mexico child welfare system. As Po had said, that was his initial inspiration for the SPIRIT project was to be able to come together and answer some of the questions that he was getting from many of his colleagues. So questions and confusions about the system from members of Taos Pueblo informed it, so we knew we needed to dedicate time and thought to making that process clear. And also, articulate how laws for Native children, so particularly the ICWA law, which is the Indian Child Welfare Act, how it works with local state and federal law.

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So, on the very first day, we started our workshop here with Po spending several hours presenting the various aspects of these laws, and the ways that they impact tribal communities. So he actually walked through the local state and federal systems for child protection. Then, we turned that afternoon of that first day into exercises that would identify the core values and ideals the community has in terms of their children. As our first workshop began, was conducted with professionals, parents, caregivers, we needed to be careful that the process didn't turn into a referendum on what's currently not working. We didn't want this to be something where people were commenting or thinking about the negative, which is a very easy place to slip to when you're doing any kind of visioning process. Instead, we needed to spend a lot of time focusing on how we create a positive vision, and work from a perspective that is values driven and based on people's excitement and energy towards the positive things in their community.

To keep the process grounded, we used a tribal rubric. Specifically we referenced four priority areas that Taos Pueblo has recently established. They established this via a resolution, which is tribal law. And this rubric of four tribal priorities were education, housing, economic development, and community health. This provided a structure for our workshops, our processes and exercises.

Susan Howley: Let me just follow up for a moment. I love the fact that you were trying to keep people focused on the vision and goals, and not slipping into criticism, because once criticism enters the room, people can become defensive and then it sort of shuts down the forward momentum and the openness in the room.

Holly Scheib: Exactly. That's exactly right. We spent a lot of time working away from that, which is actually a very difficult thing to do on a group process.

Susan Howley: So Holly, were there any activities as part of this meeting that you'd like to highlight that really engaged people in a new way?

Holly Scheib: Sure, so we used a wide range of participatory engagement techniques. They included things like collective drawing, creating multiplication, collective storytelling, word association, ranking activities, and quasi-statistics. We used all of these interchangeably and built on them and repeated many of them over and over again, which means that participants actually get better at things as they move along, and the nature of the exercises can change and become more technically specific as it moves on. The exact methods changed as the day went on. We didn't necessarily define which exercises we used beforehand.

So I found that these methods work best when you've kind of got a toolbox and can choose which ones fits the needs of the community and the group at the time. We actually received positive feedback about all of the exercises we used. I think it was less about the specific exercise and more about what happened when people saw how any of these techniques, these sort of creative

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techniques quickly became actionable data points. So, for example, we did a case study exercise where we used case studies from Po's work and created guided questions around the exercises that led participants naturally into a multi-level type analysis. Like a Bronfenbrenner type approach that looks at policy, community, family and individual perspectives for child wellbeing. This came out of a creative process. We did collective drawings. These are activities that require active and equal participation from all group members in a drawing exercise. We did storytelling based on those drawings. Those turned into mission statements.

When the group saw that they did these creative exercises and came up with very technical, multi-level visions and perspectives of child protection, or came up with very concrete mission statements and goal statements, their engagement and their trust in the process grew rapidly and became very quickly apparent. What's notable about this process as the facilitator is that, as a community scientist, I have a sense of what needs to happen and what the outcomes need to be for our data, but how the group gets there is a lot more flexible. Po, I think has some perspective on this too. At least in the first workshop, he was seeing some of the activities for the first time and could talk a little bit about what he saw, maybe in the group as well.

Po Chen:

Yeah, absolutely. I want to sort of highlight on those case studies that you described. So to describe it a little bit more fully, we do use these scenarios at Youth Heartline to train our supervise visitation staff. The workshop participants were split into two groups, and each given a different one of these scenarios and a different sheet of questions specific to those scenarios, and guidelines for how to approach the case studies. So some of the questions were very specific, like, "Oh, do you feel like so and so in this scenario was being treated fairly?" But others were focused on what kinds of policies influenced the outcome, and what kinds of different policies, or changes to policy could have led to a different and perhaps better outcome.

So, then these two groups presented their answers to each other. It turned out that virtually all of the policy ideas were identical between the two groups, despite having drastically different scenarios and worksheets. You could see their expressions and what they said, that this was having a very powerful impact, that this was a hands on demonstration of the importance and wide ranging effects of policy. So, folks even said that they got chills at this point, and I think it had a lot to do with participants who were originally unable to attend the second day of the workshop, deciding to make difficult arrangements to show up.

I think that it was a huge step in building trust and enthusiasm in the process. It's also really, really useful for me as a practitioner. It was really useful for me as a practitioner, and it's a great cross learning opportunity, because although we use these scenarios pretty regularly to train staff in a specific way, working with Holly and seeing this in action, I'm not able to add an additional layer to

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these scenarios that I'm already very familiar with, and use them for training in a broader context. We can use it for broader, strategic planning purposes within my own organization. I guess another thing that Holly mentioned to me, which I think she should speak about a little bit is our experience working with participants who didn't always feel as comfortable in English.

Holly Scheib: Yes, so we had many different age ranges in our initial workshop. Particularly some of the elder members, as we did, for example, our drawing exercises, this is tapping into a different part of the brain. When you ask someone to draw something collectively, there's a different part of the brain that's engaged. When participants went to try to describe drawings that either they made or other people made, they found themselves reaching for symbols and reaching for language and phrases that weren't easily accessible in English. We had a little bit of a hiccup, and what we realized very quickly is people wanted to use Tiwa language, their local language.

We began to encourage it. This kind of opened a little bit of a floodgate. People weren't anticipating that they would be able to use their language with English language facilitators. We did a lot of work to show that one, we were comfortable with it, and two, there was space for it, and I guess three, we volunteered to leave if there came a time where there was something that needed to be discussed that was inappropriate for us to hear. Although we were never asked to leave, I think the fact that we were so open to allowing them the space and the time to explore things in their own ways, that it made the space safe. It ended up that Tiwa got spoken quite a bit in the nature of the workshops over all of the days that we worked together, and it helped the work move along faster. People felt very comfortable kind of pulling different Tiwa phrases and ideals, and it helped them refine the goals and values that we were looking for in the work.

Po Chen: Yeah, I should mention that in the evaluations we received, particularly after this first workshop, that more than one person pointed out and was appreciative of the fact that we did offer to leave when asked.

Susan Howley: So it sounds like you had so many little things, and parts of your activities that were really creating a safe space, and a place that people could fully express their ideas. It really led to, it sounds like some great group thinking about what does a well child look like for this community.

Po Chen: I think so.

Susan Howley: Now a lot of communities, particularly we have heard for Native American communities, they've suffered from what's called drive-by research, or situations where researchers swoop in with a requirement to "engage the community." They collect some data, and then they leave. It's an open question whether people were fully engaged. How would you distinguish what you did in



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your project to what has unfortunately happened all too often in other communities?

Po Chen: Yeah, and I think that is really sad that that is the standard experience of Native American communities, in particular, but that it's shared across a lot of underserved communities in general. I think I'll ask Holly to speak more about this in the general sense, but specifically I can talk to the partnership that Youth Heartline has with Taos Pueblo, and I think that it's really just baked into the design and who we picked to work with. Youth Heartline has been and will continue to be a partner with Taos Pueblo, we're in the same geography and service community. I know, even though there are no guarantees in life, I really hope that Youth Heartline isn't going anywhere anytime soon. I mean, if only because we're only in year two of a four year lease.

Holly Scheib: Yeah, and then building on Po's comments, we've been honest from the start on our intentions and interests in working with Taos Pueblo. As Po said, he lives and works in Taos. His organization serves that community, so that's honest and real, and something that we can talk about with them. For me, Po and I are friends. We enjoy working together, and for me as an individual, my professional passion is building capacity of communities, that's what I do. To work with communities, to identify their challenges, create solutions, to address them and then carry out those solutions. We've said from the start, as long as Taos Pueblo wants that kind of engagement, I'm eager to be a part of it, and really am honored to be a part of it with them.

I think that our honesty in this process is why they've sought us out. One of the things that's happened from the fellowship process is Taos Pueblo has hired Sage Consulting as a technical partner in the strategic planning for all of their tribal priorities. So, this fellowship actually kicked off a much larger relationship that Po and I have now with Taos Pueblo. I honestly think a lot of that is because we approached through this fellowship process as honest and open partners.

Susan Howley: Now I know one of the issues that can come into play when doing this kind of research is who owns the data. How did you approach that question?

Holly Scheib: The data's not ours. We negotiated this and talked about this upfront from the start, and said, particularly because I do represent an academic background, and those are relationships that can be dangerous for tribal communities. So we talked a little in the beginning about how we felt very committed to the idea of data sovereignty, and that anything that happened within the workshops, all of that data belonged to the tribe and belonged to the participants to use however they saw fit, and that our ownership was about the process. So, Po and I have presented at a conference this summer based on some of the early findings in the fellowship process, and talked about that conference and presentation with the community and said, "We're talking about the process. There's nothing about the data that we're presenting on, the data is yours."

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We've continued to talk about that, and talk about what it means. The participants complete evaluations at the end of every day of the workshop. That is really our data. So the conversation we have with them is we are very interested in understanding the process, understanding the way that we work, the nature of our workshops, what works very well in our workshops, what we can do better, and that they can give us feedback on that, because that is our science, the process, and that the data is theirs.

Po Chen: I want to mention, too, sort of piggy backing on what Holly is saying, is that data sovereignty in a tribal context is something that is gaining quite a lot of support within tribes. Right before our first stakeholder meeting, a large number of Taos Pueblo delegates, the so-called Educational Convocation Delegation, participated in I believe a three day conference held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. One of the key components was data sovereignty. Although that was in the context of education, I believe that it was very inspiring for tribes. It sort of falls along their general desire to move towards what's called self-governance.

Holly Scheib: It was a big of a kismet opportunity for us, as they had just left this convocation. We did not know the context of this convocation. And then we came in and actually watched a video and talked about data sovereignty, and had no idea that it was actually something that was core within this convocation. So, I think there was a level of sort of kismet in the ways that we engaged where we were. They sort of instantly saw us as a potential partner who would be in the right frame of mind to partner with them in a way that they understood as being respectful right off the bat. So there are multiple things we had going for us in this regard. I don't think we would have had any of those things had we not been oriented to thinking about how to negotiate ownership of different parts of the process, and honest about our intentions.

Susan Howley: That's great. Now you've talked a couple of times about having evaluation forms, or what you heard following the meeting. So, generally, what sort of feedback did you hear about this stakeholder meeting? I can tell that you feel it was successful. What were the indicators for that?

Po Chen: Oh, absolutely. So a couple indicators are, we have both formal and informal indicators. On the formal side, we did solicit evaluation forms. I'll describe some of the feedback that appeared on that. We asked them five questions. Questions such as, how did you feel, was the process culturally sensitive, was it culturally appropriate, was it respectful, what did you learn, those sorts of questions. But also informal, which we touched on a little bit in previous questions. People who originally, when they registered for the workshop said that, well they could only come for the first day, and then making the arrangements, which we understood to involve quite a bit of difficult scheduling shifting, to be available on the second one.

All told, our first workshop had 11 participants and these 11 participants represented seven different roles within the tribe. So, we had people who had a

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leadership position, who worked in administration, who were involved in the educational side, community health, tribal court, something called the priority team, which is tasked with moving forward the four tribal priorities under resolution as Holly described earlier. And also a contingent of delegates that were sent to this educational convocation. So, in addition to that, we would also just hear people expressing amazement. So for instance, when I mentioned that sort of case study exercise at the end of the first day of the workshop, it was very audible. People were telling us that this was exciting, that they were very energized about day two, and making arrangements that they could attend.

All told, the first workshop, the participants contributed a combined 116 hours of work over the course of the two days. For the formal feedback, I've taken the liberty of pulling a few choice quotations. I'll just read a couple of them. So, one quote, "I felt I had my voice heard, it was mentally and physically shown how much impact my input made to my community." Here's a second one, "It required a different way of thinking. It used a group process, everyone's participation. We built on ideas and a way of fine tuning to capture what we truly wanted to say." I think one of the most powerful pieces of evaluation that Holly and I received is this next statement, which is, "I learned I am capable to effect change. That I have the knowledge, training and tools deep within myself to be an advocate for change." That's a wonderful thing for Holly and me, that we are explicitly in this, and SPIRIT is explicitly designed to build capacity of our partners.

Holly Scheib: Yeah, to build off that, I think that the goal, the ultimate goal of participatory work is to work with communities to uncover what people know, but they didn't know they knew. The power of what knowledge is and to break down the hierarchy that there's only certain types of knowledge that is privilege. So that last comment, when we sat together, Po and I, reading this, and when we found that last comment, our initial thought was, this is it. This is exactly what we're working for here, and whatever we're doing is speaking directly to the ultimate goal of any kind of participatory process. So, we were particularly excited by that feedback.

Susan Howley: That's just wonderful. Now you mentioned that you did a second group as well with the youth. What was your experience there?

Holly Scheib: So participants in the first workshops were so eager for more. They wanted us to replicate this activity with elders, with tribal leadership, with youth, et cetera, et cetera. So upon conversation with the tribal administrator, we decided to carry out a second workshop with youth, since SPIRIT is about child well-being. The workshop itself happened a month after, about four weeks after the initial workshop. It happened over a day in June, so it was during the summer. We did get data relevant to the goals of the fellowship. However, we learned things from this process that have influenced our work since then.

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So, first, one of the things that we did, we didn't meet with the youth before this workshop. So unlike all of the other processes where we had had opportunities to talk to all different kinds of stakeholders, and they had some familiarity with us, some familiarity with how we work, we were able to kind of prep people a little with what to expect. With the youth, they were completely new to us. So we coordinated this with adults, and with youth program coordinators. Some of those people coordinating were also unknown to us, and had not participated in our prior workshop.

So there was an added layer of not only of youth not being prepped for the experience, but the adults who were bringing them and coordinating them also not really knowing what this experience would be. So in that sense, I was limited a little bit in my tool box in terms of activities. Po and I really didn't know who to expect or what to expect, or even a clear idea of the age ranges to expect. So, we realized, once we started working with them, that having a meeting room with facilitators is actually not the best way to engage with youth. It's too much like a classroom experience, which is actually not the safest place for Native children.

So, had we had more insight into this, we could have used more outside practices. We could have rethought the structure of the workshop to be outdoors, and to involve photography or theater or music, or things that were more relevant to their everyday lives. So from this, we learned that it's really important for us to meet directly with potential participants before each workshop, so that we can understand them, and we can better meet their needs and speak to their experiences in the process.

Susan Howley: I see Holly, that goes back to that earlier point that you made about having a number of tools in the toolbox and being prepared to be flexible on site or in the moment. Here, because you hadn't had that opportunity to do advance work, you lost some of the ability to be flexible.

Holly Scheib: That's right, that's right. I think that there's toolbox that are appropriate for indoor space and sort of classroom type facilitation, which is different than toolboxes that can be applied to working outdoors, or working at alternative sites. I think that had we had a little more exposure to different parts of the community, and had opportunities to really get to know the youth that we would be working with, we could have better understood their needs. So it showed us now, now as we go into meetings and we plan these workshops, everything that we do is precipitated by a series of meetings where we have interaction with the people that we're going to have in these meetings, so that we can think very directly about what is going to be best for them, and how we can best serve them when we do these data collection and workshop activities.

Susan Howley: You know, one of the take-aways that I'm getting from this conversation is just, how much time and thought you all had to invest to really be inclusive and to really be open to the engagement of the community. This was not something

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where you could just go in with a checklist, one, two, three and get it done, as long as you did all the right things. You just had to invest so much time and thought in every step of the process.

Po Chen:

Absolutely. I think that we're lucky in the sense that Taos Pueblo has been a community that I've worked with for a number of years, and I'd like Holly's opinion on what it was like walking into that relationship sort of brand new, because I can't remember that day anymore really. But one of the things that's really clear to me, and I think this is also true for many underserved communities, is that there is nothing more powerful than seeing someone face-to-face, and interacting with them on an individual level.

So, one of the lessons that we learned is that email is not a great way to get a message out, to build engagement. Phone calls are a little bit better, but really what knocks it out of the park is in-person, face-to-face conversations, usually bolstered by someone else at Taos Pueblo leveraging a trust network. Whether that's from the tribal administrator, or from my colleagues who work at health and community services, it really just comes down to person-to-person relationships. Yes, there is an understanding that Sage Consulting is a thing and it's an entity, and that Youth Heartline is a thing, and that's an institution, but what it boils down to is they have relationships with Holly. They have relationships with Po. If we were able to swap out different people, still from our organizations, there would be a very marked sort of change in the dynamic, because the relationship is with Youth Heartline through me and the relationship with Sage is through Holly.

Holly Scheib:

Absolutely. I do remember those early days that Po was talking about, and frankly it was a little frustrating and scary, because we would put a lot of planning into these meetings, and then walk in and not even know if they were going to happen or find that there were changes. So, we had thoughts about, we thought we knew who was going to show up and then completely different people would show up, or the times would change. We learn quickly that there is this alternative kind of calendar that is used, and things change on an instant.

If you want to work in that environment, you have to be able to adjust to that. We're all people with jobs and lives and all these things going on. We have calendars for a reason. To have to work in that kind of environment can be difficult. We had to sort of persevere through that. What we found was that we have to just be there. We have to show up and be there. When we do that, we can move things along, but it takes not one of those just being there meetings. It takes multiple ones over multiple time, because different people can show up at different times. And just being available for those opportunities is very critical. I appreciate too that Po points out that we do have now these individual relationships. Anybody else that comes in has to develop that as well. While the organizations, while they are cognizant and will reference these organizations, it is our personal relationships that give our agencies entrée. And that is really

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part of what working with Taos Pueblo means, is taking the time to develop those kinds of relationships.

Po Chen: It gets easier. It does. I think that we see that too. In the beginning, it would be me sitting in the lobby of an office, waiting for about four hours for a meeting because something came up with the tribal administrator that they needed to take. But, as we've sort of collaborated more, and built that relationship, we've become more important too.

Holly Scheib: Po mentioned going and sitting and waiting outside offices, he's really not exaggerating. That's exactly what happened, in multiple instances. One of the things now is as we've been working with them more and more, they, the community members, are offering to do more outreach on behalf of our shared work. So, we're in the process right now of trying to assemble a community forum. They're actually, this came out of the group, the group said, "Well, let's take flyers, and we're going to use our voter outreach canvassing of the community, and we're going to take this next step." So, as we give face time, it's met with an enormous amount of effort and enthusiasm from the community itself. So, any effort that we give, we get back for sure, but it definitely took time for us to build that and see that and have that foundation to work from.

Susan Howley: But your investment is really paying dividends now.

Po Chen: Oh, absolutely.

Susan Howley: So, just taking this conversation a bit broader, you've done such great work with this community, and things are going strong. What do you see in the future for this type of work with other Native American communities, or other areas of community-based participatory research.

Holly Scheib: That's a great question. I feel that any scientist, practitioner, any community organization is very familiar with the need for reliable data that's relevant, actionable, and understandable. There's a huge divide between community level practitioners and researchers. So, those on the community level are often distrustful of evaluation and evaluators, and of research and researchers, because they feel it's not relevant to their lives. Then those on the research side often undervalue or maybe even ignore qualitative or participatory research, because they don't really see it as fitting into a positivist or post-positivist scientific method. That's a narrow lens from which to see the world, and really creates a big divide between two groups that are ultimately speaking the same language, and need to work together.

I see community-based participatory research bridging that gap. I feel that bridging that gap is in the interest of all of us. No statistical process in the world can solve the problem of bad data. Data often doesn't ask the right questions. It doesn't go deep enough. There's problems with representation. It can be biased in so, so many ways, and the answer to all of those ultimately is about investing

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in communities themselves, so that they find ways to tap into local knowledge and help create better platforms for understanding their communities, through things like good data and good planning.

So, if we want to understand victimization in Native communities – or in any vulnerable communities, but particularly Native communities, which are sovereign people in our country, – then we have to invest time in building the capacity of those communities, to understand what data is, and to see that their knowledge is valuable within it, and then support them in using data in ways that informs and improves their lives. Otherwise, there's no incentive for Native communities, or any community to participate in data collection for the sake of data. There's no shortcut to it. There's no shortcut to good information. It takes engagement, it takes capacity building, the community needs to understand and be a part of the process. It takes an honest and open partnership to get there.

I think that Po and I very much want to expand on what we started with SPIRIT. We believe in this process. We believe in the future of community-based participatory science as a way to not only build a solid foundation in child protection, but also increase the capacity of communities on a much larger scale to think about how information can be powerful, and how their information can change their lives.

Susan Howley: That's excellent. Po, as a practitioner, anything you'd like to add to that?

Po Chen: Sure, a couple things. Sort of on the more specific levels, what's been really exciting about working with Taos Pueblo, not only because it's in my own backyard and actually has deep ramifications for how to support all children, vulnerable children and their families in our community, because the intersection of tribal, local state and federal child welfare systems is not working so well. I mean, that's why ... that's the original genesis of SPIRIT.

But, I also believe that such problems are not unique to Taos Pueblo. They're not even unique to Northern New Mexico. It's all around the state, and it's in places like Alaska, and South Dakota. It's all over the place when there is that intersection of tribal communities with a very different set of histories and cultural understandings and practices that need to work in the boundaries of federal and state child welfare systems, which is really dispersed.

For instance, the Indian Child Welfare Act is this very broad piece of legislation that controls virtually all child welfare children's courtrooms, and governs what people are supposed to do, but enforcement has been a perennial problem. The law has been around since the 1970s, and yet we see that there are very prevalent non-compliance and non-implementing courtrooms and individuals. That completely undercuts it because there isn't like an ICWA police in the federal government that shows up with sirens blaring if people aren't meeting their obligations. It's also a complicated law with many, many, many pages and new guidelines being updated and submitted. It also has a tough public relations

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life, based on things that have happened in the public consciousness in the past couple of years, specifically the baby Veronica case.

So, what I'm really excited about with SPIRIT is that it sort of rebalances the scale of how that intersection of these multiple systems needs to work. Instead of putting all of the eggs into everyone needs to just get on board with the federal and state systems, it's really exploring what's powerful and helpful and effective in these tribal communities, because they are experts in a way that the federal government, and the state and local communities just won't ever be. So, strengthening that aspect of that intersection, hopefully we can get to a more equal and functional intersecting child welfare system.

Susan Howley: Thank you for that. Holly, anything you'd like that add?

Holly Scheib: No, your questions have been very thoughtful, and it's exciting to be able to speak about this. If anything, I would love to just be able to say thank you to the fellowship for the opportunity. It's not easy to find support for these kinds of intensely community focused approaches, and it's rare to find one with the kind of flexibility and collegial support that we found in the fellowship. We're just really thankful to be part of the process.

Susan Howley: Holly and Po, I want to thank you so much for the time that you've spent with us today. You've given us so much to think about how to be truly inclusive, as we gather information from our community stakeholders and give them the tools that they need to do this work on their own.

Po Chen: Thank you so much for the opportunity. It's been a pleasure.

Holly Scheib: Thank you so much.