



*Discussion of the importance of seeking Indigenous knowledge, wisdom and guidance as a helper to others along the healing journey*

# *Seeking Indigenous Guidance in Mental Health Clinical Practice*

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# *Waq lisi*

*(How are you?)*



LeeAndria Witcraft, LCSW

- Enrolled member of the Fort Bidwell Indian Community and descendant of the Klamath Tribes
- Daughter of Joni and Martin Witcraft. Maternal granddaughter of Louis Townsend and the late Antonia Jimenez and paternal granddaughter of Dorothy and the late John Witcraft
- Mom to 2 sons: Daniel and Ira
- Graduated from Eastern Washington University with a B.S in Community Health (2015) and a Master of Social Work Degree (2017)
- Currently employed with Cow Creek Behavioral Health and will soon be transitioning to the Ko-Kwel Wellness Center in Eugene Oregon

# *Indigenous Guidance*

Indigenous guidance and connection has not only been essential to my life and personal development, but has also been incredibly important to my development as a clinician as I walk alongside others on their healing journeys

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Childhood and  
Through the Lifespan



Along the Education  
Journey



In the Behavioral  
Health Field

# *Planted Seeds*



*I believe people in the healing field are called to be their...*

My calling was evident to me at a very young age

- Like many other people, my desire to work in the mental health field was influenced by the experiences I had growing up
  - My parents and many others in my family and community suffered from addiction
  - I experienced and witnessed significant abuse and neglect especially in my early years of life
  - I experienced and witnessed racism, prejudice and perpetuation of negative stereotypes of my people

***It was later I would understand these experiences resulted from generations of historical trauma, genocide and erasure of indigenous peoples existence***

# Connections and Protections



*My calling to the field also resulted from connections and protections formed and provided throughout my life.*

- Throughout childhood my siblings and I were actively involved in the powwow circle where we danced, drummed, prayed and served others
- I would be able to attend a few great indigenous youth conferences in the Northwest
- Engaged in healing circles, tribal ceremonies and culture camps
- I attended a Native boarding school in high school, where my maternal great grandparents had gone

***In each of these experiences I would be provided the opportunity to listen, learn stories and hear personal life experiences, strengths and opportunities for the future***

# *Journey in Academia*



*I entered college KNOWING I wanted to help my people*

- I moved away from home at 19 as a single mom to go to college hundreds of miles away from my home
- I would immediately be connected with the American Indian Studies program on campus. This is where I found a sense of community, encouragement, help and understanding from staff and other native students

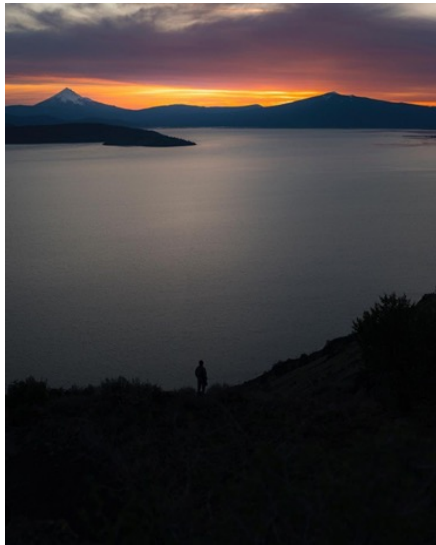
***It is in college where I would begin to learn the extent and impact of historical trauma, attempted genocide and erasure of indigenous peoples history***

I centered my education and work around learning about, advocating for and promoting the health and wellness of Indigenous people- **but I had to make it that way**



# *Clinical Programs*

Learning a little bit about a lot



There are several different degree tracks that allow one to become a mental health clinician. I chose Social Work as it aligned closest with my goals to help my community.

**The social work mission according to the NASW is to** *"enhance human well-being and help meet basic and complex needs of all people, with a particular focus on those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty"*.

- Masters level clinical programs typically span 1-2 years depending on background education and experience
- People of all educational backgrounds are able to apply for masters level programs
- Clinical programs are often times a means to an end
- Loan repayment programs encourage clinicians to work for tribal programs and other underserved populations (IHS, HRSA, etc)

# Clinical Program Gaps



Many individuals enter clinical practice in tribal communities due to availability of jobs and for benefits like loan repayment programs without an adequate understanding of tribal history, historical trauma and importance of providing culturally informed care.

This can lead to:

- Misinterpretation of cultural values, service, traditions, roles and tribal customs
- Appropriation and generalization of individuals, groups and tribal nations
- Perpetuation of stereotypes, prejudice and implicit bias
- Disconnect in definition and understanding of healing and each individuals healing journey
- Care centered around billing (\$), insurance limitations, and use of westernized interventions



# *Seeking Indigenous Knowledge, Wisdom and Guidance*



- Seeking Indigenous Knowledge, Wisdom and Guidance throughout my life, my academic journey and in clinical practice has been so important in promoting healing for myself and others I have the honor of working with.
- I have worked in several tribal communities and lean on knowledge and wisdom provided by the individuals I work with, from tribal members, from co-workers and other indigenous clinicians in the mental health field.
- It is so important to identify and connect with what your culture means to you and to connect with your spirit. Pray in your way, smudge, cleanse and learn to protect yourself and your energy as this is hard work

# *Tips and Supports for Indigenous Clinicians*



- Finding the appropriate people and knowledge is not always easy and requires you to be open, willing to learn and to step out of the box
  - Talk to other tribal programs (culture, education, social services departments)
  - Attend appropriate community events, and reach out to help. Be open to learning
  - Network with the Indigenous clinicians you meet: Indian country is small and you never know who knows who
  - Be open to the idea that every interaction has a purpose there is always something you can learn from the people you meet
  - Read books, read articles, look for and attend trainings and workshops that center on culturally appropriate and trauma informed care
  - Be willing and open to step up, share and teach the things that you learn- this is how we pass along knowledge