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Reclamation: Returning to matrilineal traditions, building a new generation of indigenous Girl Societies

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RECLAMATION



**Returning to Matrilineal Traditions,
Building a New Generation of
Indigenous Girl Societies**

IMAGEN Workshop
Sioux Falls, South Dakota
December 3-5, 2019

Why Adolescent Indigenous Girls?

AGE 11-12

- **Native youth** rank lowest in United States high school graduation rates
- 1 in 8 American Indian and Alaska Native **(AI/AN) high schoolers** report experiencing sexual coercion
- 1 in 3 **Native American women** reports having been sexually assaulted in her lifetime
- **Native girls** have the highest rate of teen births nationwide compared to other racial groups
- **Native girls** face high risks of trafficking

When programs treat Native youth as a monolith, vulnerable subgroups of young people and consideration for their lived realities are missed.

There is an urgent need for culturally-grounded programming designed specifically for adolescent indigenous girls.

Right: Workshop participants identified major events in the lives of indigenous girls, by age group, that may present risky situations

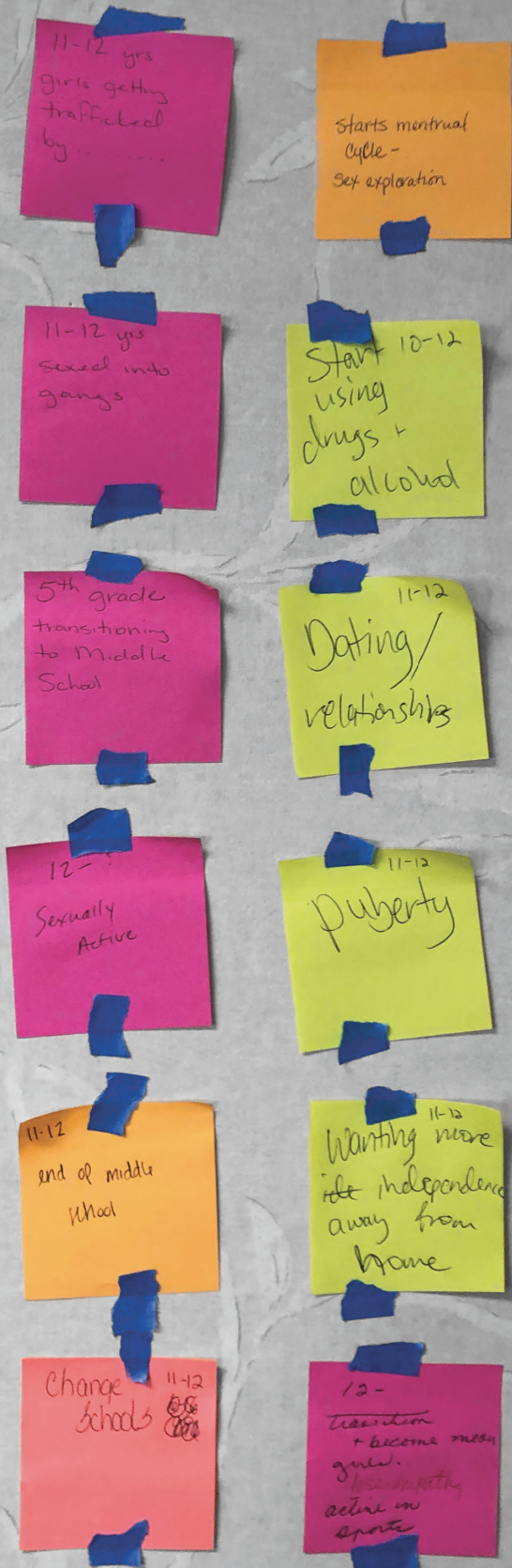


IMAGEN At-A-Glance

Created in 2017, the Indigenous Adolescent Girls' Empowerment Network (IMAGEN) brings together organizations from rural and urban indigenous communities in the U.S. to strengthen the protection, safety, and resilience of girls by reclaiming neighborhood spaces and building local female relative-led mentorship programs.

IMAGEN, headquartered at the Girl Innovation, Research, and Learning (GIRL) Center in New York City, promotes the use of data-driven approaches in building assets for these adolescent girls. This includes adapting planning tools that have been tried and tested for 20 years to establish intentionally-designed safe spaces programs with indigenous populations around the globe.

WHAT WE DO

Fellowships


With support from the ForGood Fund and the Ford Foundation, IMAGEN launched its Fellowship program for Native female-led indigenous organizations in 2019. Through this initiative, which provided grants of \$7,000 to \$40,000, recipient groups will receive continued support in using girl-centered programming tools and implementing low-cost local mentorship networks in their communities.

Workshops & Technical Assistance

IMAGEN hosts fortnightly workshops (in-person and virtual) with network members, grantees, and prospective organizations. These events serve as a platform for sharing best practices in the roll-out of mentorship programs while building a larger community of practice. IMAGEN also facilitates further technical assistance and knowledge sharing through webinars, site visits, and at stakeholder conferences.

GIRL-POWERED

The IMAGEN approach recognizes that the best tools to support our girls in navigating adolescence have existed for centuries as components of Native American tradition. Matrilineal leadership was a major lifeway for many Native Nations before its erasure by colonial forces. IMAGEN seeks to reclaim this framework as an empowerment tool by establishing neighborhood-level "Girl Societies." These mentorship groups, led by elder female relatives, are designed to serve as hubs of safety and support for the girls through carefully adapted and culturally relevant programs.



LeToy Lunderman leads a discussion about social assets for indigenous girls

Sioux Falls Workshop

On December 3-5, 2019, the inaugural cohort of Fellowship Grantee groups convened in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, for a program planning workshop hosted by IMAGEN.

The meeting served as an opportunity for the grantees to formulate plans for community engagement, girl recruitment, mentor training, and material development. The agenda included:

- > **Envisioning a brighter future for indigenous girls** by creating a narrative vision statement
- > **Exploring the data** available globally regarding the risks faced by girls as they transition from girlhood to adolescence, and sharing the unique risks that exist for indigenous girls in the U.S.
- > **Strategies for identifying girls' strengths and needs**, and exploring how these might differ according to age group and household characteristics
- > **Program planning for safe spaces** and methods for engaging stakeholders, including traditional leadership
- > **Exploring Guatemala's history** of systematic exclusion of indigenous populations, and discussing the lessons learned from the Girl Societies set in place there

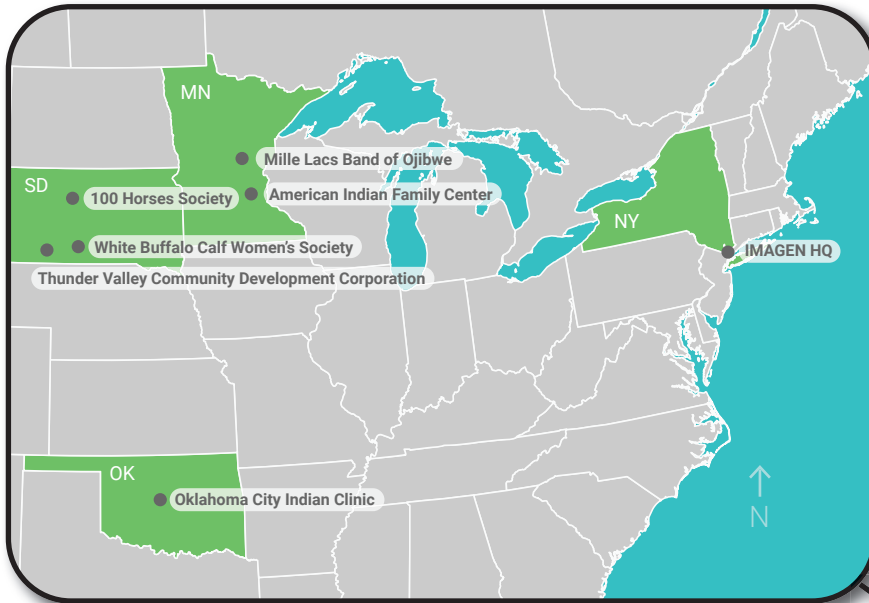
Participants at the Sioux Falls workshop included:

- Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation
- Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
- 100 Horses Society
- American Indian Family Center
- Oklahoma City Indian Clinic
- White Buffalo Calf Women's Society
- *Abriendo Oportunidades*
- IMAGEN

Below: Pam Gokey, Jessica Gourneau, Victoria O'Rourke and Sharisse Sitting Bear discuss key steps needed to sustain Girl Societies in the communities



Discovering Shared Histories



Left and below: IMAGEN network members represent myriad indigenous communities from across the country. The map on the left shows the regional distribution of the workshop attendees, which includes programs serving both rural and urban indigenous populations. The map on the bottom left is of Guatemala, home to the *Abriendo Oportunidades* Girl Societies.

The workshop was honored to have several sessions facilitated by Ángel del Valle, co-founder of the *Abriendo Oportunidades* program in Guatemala. *Abriendo Oportunidades* (Opening Opportunities) works with Mayan young women to establish and operate empowerment groups with local adolescent girls. There, girls have the chance to take on leadership roles while learning practical and protective skills that will serve them in their adolescence and adulthood.

Del Valle's discussions provided an opportunity for participants to understand the shared histories of systematic oppression faced by indigenous populations in both Guatemala and the U.S., including



the suppression of knowledge and traditions that were once protective of girls and their communities.

These sessions highlighted how the obstacles currently faced by indigenous girls in both countries mirrored one another. The conversation also identified a potential opportunity in the future to connect girls from both countries in a cross-cultural dialogue about their lived realities.

Reclaiming a Narrative

Photos on pages 2, 3, 4, and 6: Stephanie Martinez



Since the culmination of the Sioux Falls workshop and with the support of continued cohort-wide virtual check-ins and one-on-one technical assistance, IMAGEN's grantee organizations have already been hard at work meeting with local stakeholders, recruiting girls, and beginning mentorship program activities in their communities.

As these safe spaces continue to meet and expand in 2020, IMAGEN looks forward to sharing more updates.

Above: Participants celebrate the culmination of the workshop

Back row (left to right): Mary LeBeau, Aimee Pond, Kala Roberts, Victoria Star Boy, Medina Matonis, Mariah Lapointe, Ashley Rogers, Kelsey Wilson, Meagan Mahtushquah, Jessica Gourneau

Front row (left to right): Rosalita Roach, Sandra Frazier, Kelly Hallman, Victoria O'Rourke, Sharisse Sitting Bear, Pam Gokey, Ángel del Valle, Lisa Polen

Stay up-to-date on our grantees' activities, and learn more about girl-centered program design in indigenous communities by visiting us at:

www.imagen-network.org



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