

It Is Complex;

This Task Of Responding To Tribal Communities In A Way That Respects And Honors Traditions.

Overall preparation and responses to crime victims in tribal communities must reflect and respect the wide variety of cultural and spiritual implications. Effective service provider response will include both the cultural and spiritual considerations in order to meet the needs of families of homicide victims in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

Traditions can vary widely from one community to another on the same Tribal Land. In the event of violent death, burial rites and rituals may even be influenced from family to family in the same community based upon how each family practices their traditional culture. This can be stunning to those in victim services and criminal justice; investigating the homicide scene or providing advocacy to the victim's family.

In order to properly honor and respect traditions, law enforcement and service providers need to have established contacts in their individual tribal communities who can provide guidance on local customs, prior to a crime occurring. Such insights cannot be learned from a book. Families involved in the crimes being investigated are individuals in separate Nations. We have the privilege of serving individuals and families in their most desperate moments, after a victimization has occurred. Within that context; we are honored to come alongside unique individuals and each separate family is unique. Those in victim services and criminal justice need to develop trusted working relationships within the Tribal community where they serve.

Generalities among tribal communities must never be assumed, any more than one would read a book on Germany to understand the French. Criminal investigations, too, will vary in size and scope. Characteristically, however, for healing to begin, American Indian and Alaska Native families must be involved, each in their own way, in the investigation when their loved one is victimized. Communication with the family on the part of all involved criminal justice entities will always pay big dividends when gathering necessary information related to the crime, future participation in court proceedings, and in interactions which can be ongoing for years. Victim assistance professionals have often proven to be most effective in sensitively engaging the victim's family and witnesses during the initial investigative stages. As a matter of protocol, victim service providers should routinely be one of the first persons dispatched to respond to the crime scene.

Unified Solutions Tribal Community Development Inc.

*Gayle Thom, Project Director -- Counseling & Faith-Based Services for Crime Victims in Indian Country
Telephone: 1-877-438-4400, ext. 4 -- Mobile: 605.209.0860 -- gayle@unified-solutions.org*