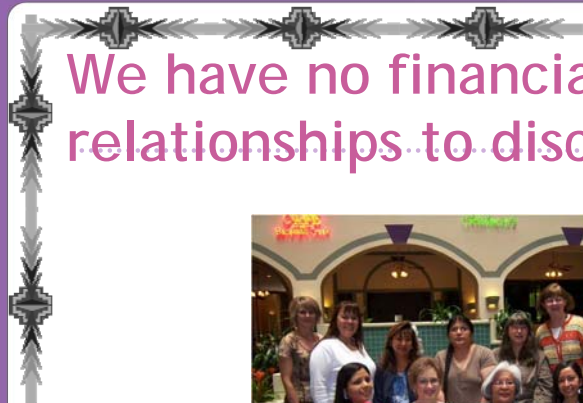


# *THE COMING OF THE BLESSING®* A Successful Cross- Cultural Initiative

Presented by:  
Dr. Carol Arnold  
& Denise Aragon



We have no financial  
relationships to disclose.....



## A Successful Collaboration

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- Between American Indian/Alaska Natives and the March of Dimes



## The March of Dimes

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To improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality.



**Fund Research**  
to understand the problem and discover answers.



**Help Moms**  
have full-term pregnancies and healthy babies.



**Support Families**  
comforting them when their baby needs help to survive and thrive.

## Working Together

Volunteers, donors, researchers, educators, outreach workers and advocates work together to support the mission.



## American Indian and Alaska Natives – Culturally Diverse.....



- Over 4 million
- 565 Federally recognized tribes
- 300 Reservations
- Over 300 languages



U.S. Census Bureau (2010); U.S. Department of Health and Human Service OMH(2011)



## History & Identity



- Can not be grouped as 1 homogenous people.
- Removed from homelands and forced onto reservations.
- Children sent to boarding schools.
  - Attempts to erase the culture.
- May mistrust government, dominant society.
- May mistrust Western medicine.



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## Family Values/Spirituality- Strengths of the community.....

- Strong family connections
- Extended family considered immediate family.
- Spiritual and may blend traditional with Christian beliefs



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## Time Orientation & World View

- Casual and present-oriented
- Circular and holistic
  - Integration of physical, spiritual, emotional and environment
- Emphasize past, not future



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## Common Health Beliefs Strengths of the Community.....

- Health is balance between physical, emotional and spiritual self in relationship to world
- Mind, body and spirit are part of healing.
- May use traditional healing: Sweat lodge, talking circles, songs, prayers, herbs, sacred grasses



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## Health Disparities

- Higher rates for diabetes, obesity, hypertension, alcohol, violence, unintended injuries.
- 24% uninsured
- IHS reaches approximately 2 million
  - Limited access if not on reservation.
- Infant Mortality
  - Second highest rate in the U.S. - 8.5/1000
- Prematurity
  - Second highest rate in the U.S. - 14.1%



U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, IHS (2011); March of Dimes Peristats (2011)

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## Health Disparities

- Highest rate of late/no prenatal care
- Highest rate of inadequate prenatal care
- Barriers:
  - Access to care
  - Poverty
  - Family Violence
  - Fear of healthcare system
  - Transportation
  - Belief system may clash with Western beliefs
  - Perceived and real cultural insensitivity by providers



U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, IHS (2011); March of Dimes Peristats, 2011

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## A Successful Collaboration

### Shoshone/Arapaho Prenatal Education Project with March of Dimes, Early Head Start, & volunteer faculty

- Began in 1998
- Teaching in the traditional way from mother, aunts, grandmothers



## Evaluation in 2006

### Qualitative evaluation Served more than 400

- Education
- Support
- Access
- Empowerment

### Waiting List

### Needs

- Culturally appropriate prenatal information



Arnold, C. (2006). Pregnancy Workshop and Shoshone and Arapaho Tribes

## Nationwide Survey by Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma



Reviewed **510** maternal-child pamphlets used by health care professionals

**Only 48 or 9.4%** of pamphlets were culturally appropriate for American Indian or Alaska Native families



Sohail Khan, Director of Health Research, Cherokee Nation Health Service



## A Commitment to Action



March of Dimes - West Region  
American Indian/Alaska Native  
Women's Committee

Summer of 2006

AI/AN women volunteering to review prenatal education needs

- 13 different Nations/Tribes
- A common goal



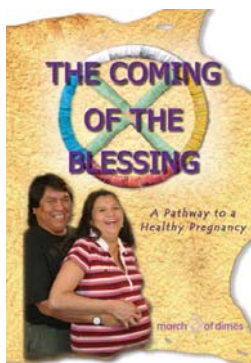
## The Committee Worked

- Reviewed available AI/AN prenatal literature
- Conducted focus groups
  - Providers and clients
- The Need
  - One comprehensive booklet on prenatal care targeting the AI/AN family



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## *The Coming of the Blessing®*



Based on the core values common to all AI/AN Nations

- Love of family
- Honor of mother and child
- Sacred time of pregnancy
- Importance of the father and family
- Spirituality



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## *The Coming of the Blessing®*



Knowledge for a healthy pregnancy using the circle of life

Value the traditional pathway of teaching by mothers, grandmothers

Traditional and ancestral wisdom



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## *The Coming of the Blessing®*

### •A Positive Message

- Preconception Care
- Trimesters of Pregnancy
- Risks to Pregnancy



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## Distribution for Pilot Year 2008

### Pilot printing of 7,500

- Selected reservations and Pueblos across the Western US and Alaska
- Given by a provider with discussion
- Evaluation from the Moms/readers
  - incentives



## Evaluation Results (181n)

Women from 44 different Nations and 10 states

88% between 18-35

13 preterm births with 1 twin birth

- Preterm birth rate of 7.5% vs. 14.1% for AI/AN infants



## Evaluation Results (181n)



### Message from the committee

- 12 Non AI/AN women did respond
- They did not like the booklet
- May demonstrate the importance of cultural relevance in patient education materials



## Evaluation Results (181n)



### Behavior changes - 90%

- Changed eating habits
- Reduced stress
- Started to Exercise
- Decided to breastfeed

Stopped or reduced smoking or taking drugs



## Evaluation Results (181n)



- 88% kept all of their prenatal appointments
- 88% believed the ancestral wisdom was helpful
- 78% believed that the traditional beliefs were helpful

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## Evaluation Results (181n)

### THE MEDICINE WHEEL



### What the Women Wrote

- Helpful information for my life
- Values my traditional heritage
- Makes me proud to be a part of my culture
- Helped me stay true to our beliefs

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## Evaluation Results (181n)

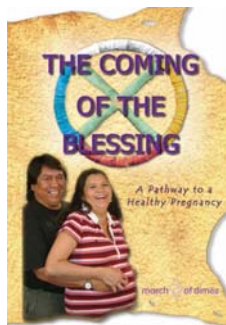
### What the Women Wrote



- Lets you know about our ancestors
- Family is most of all important for supporting each other
- Great information by Natives for Natives
- It talks to you
- THANK YOU



## Award Winning Committee/ Initiative



2009

National Perinatal Association-  
Transcultural Award

2010

National Indian Health Board-  
Regional Impact Award

2011

APHA - Effective Practice MCH  
Award



## Posters



## Photo Stories



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## Prenatal Education

- Uses March of Dimes curriculum *Becoming a Mom*
- Includes appendix to guide facilitators in adapting content for American Indian/Alaska Native audience.



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pregnancy & newborn  
health education center  
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## Facilitator Trainings



Alaska  
Arizona  
New Mexico  
North Dakota  
South Dakota  
Wisconsin  
Wyoming



## Most Remote - Alaska



St. Paul Island by  
Leatha Merculieff



## IHS Promising Practice



2010

The Coming of the Blessing was designated as a “Promising Practice” by Indian Health Service.

Results of a 2<sup>nd</sup> evaluation could upgrade the initiative to “evidence-based”.



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## The Initiative

The Coming of the Blessing is...

- an umbrella for any activity implemented by March of Dimes specifically for American Indian/Alaska Native families.
- Including
  - Facilitator trainings
  - Prenatal classes
  - Support for families with NICU babies
  - Traveling AI/AN photo exhibit



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## 2<sup>nd</sup> Evaluation in 2011-2012

- Participant Satisfaction
- Facilitator Satisfaction
- Participant Demographics
- Knowledge Change
- Behavior Change
- Birth Outcomes



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## Success of Collaborative Efforts



- Matching Mission and Need
- Building trust\*
  - Takes work on all sides
- Empowerment\*
  - "I never knew I had a voice before"
- Commitment



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Can you imagine the day when  
every baby is born healthy?



We can.



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The End

Thank you  
for  
Attending!



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## You can reach us

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- Denise Aragon at [sahstar@tribcsp.com](mailto:sahstar@tribcsp.com)
- Carol Arnold at [carnold@twu.edu](mailto:carnold@twu.edu)
- March of Dimes at [marchofdimes.com](http://marchofdimes.com)



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Photos: *Coming of the Blessing*®; Dr. Carol Arnold, and Google images American Indian/Alaska Native women

