By Mary Ann Mowatt, M.S. and Adam K. Matz, M.S.

NATIVE AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN GANGS

Much has been written about the place of gangs in American culture and their current impact. New information regarding the involvement of Native Americans in gangs, both in and outside of Indian Country, is beginning to emerge (National Drug Intelligence Center [NDIC], 2011). Limited research has been conducted regarding this phenomenon leaving many unanswered questions concerning the exact extent of this involvement. This update provides an overview of what is known about the prevalence and nature of Native American involvement in gangs in Indian communities as well as within other U.S. jurisdictions. It concludes with a brief summary of Native American-sensitive programs that integrate traditional cultural

values which have been a continued source of strength for this population.

Three different types of gangs will be discussed in this update. The first is gangs located within Indian Country. The second type is the urban gang located in a major metropolitan community. The third type of gang to be discussed is referred to as the "hybrid" gang which reflects a gang that has components of both Indian Country and urban organizations and often reflects a new, emerging entity. When considering gangs of any of these three types, it is important to remember that while almost all tribal communities share some common issues and challenges, each community is ultimately unique. What describes gangs or explains gang issues on one reservation, within one nation or in one urban community may not apply to another (National Violence Prevention Resource Center [NVPRC], 2006; Grant, 2013).

That said, well over 400 gangs and 28,000 Native American gang members are believed to reside on tribal land and in urban areas (Cobb, Matz, & Mullins, 2011; Joseph & Taylor, 2003; Rogers, Matz, & Mowatt, 2013).[3] Among the largest reservations in the United States, the Navajo Nation is reported to have over 225 gangs, primarily located on tribal land in Arizona and New Mexico. The Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota is estimated to be home to over 39 gangs (Eckholm, 2009) and more than 5,000 gang members (Pember, 2009).[4] Another major reservation, the Tohono O'odham Nation in Arizona has identified 19 gangs (Eckholm, 2009).

In a 2010 study by the NDIC, face-to-face interviews with individuals who were known or believed to be knowledgeable about gang activity in Indian Country were conducted. Eligible tribal communities represented in this study meet two of the following criteria: identified a gang presence through intelligence assessments, federal investigations or open-source research; bordered a major metropolitan area that had a gang presence; and/or were within 100 miles of a major U.S. interstate highway. Ultimately, 81 percent of the 132 tribal communities involved in the study reported that gang activity was present.

NATIVE AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN GANGS ON THE RESERVATION

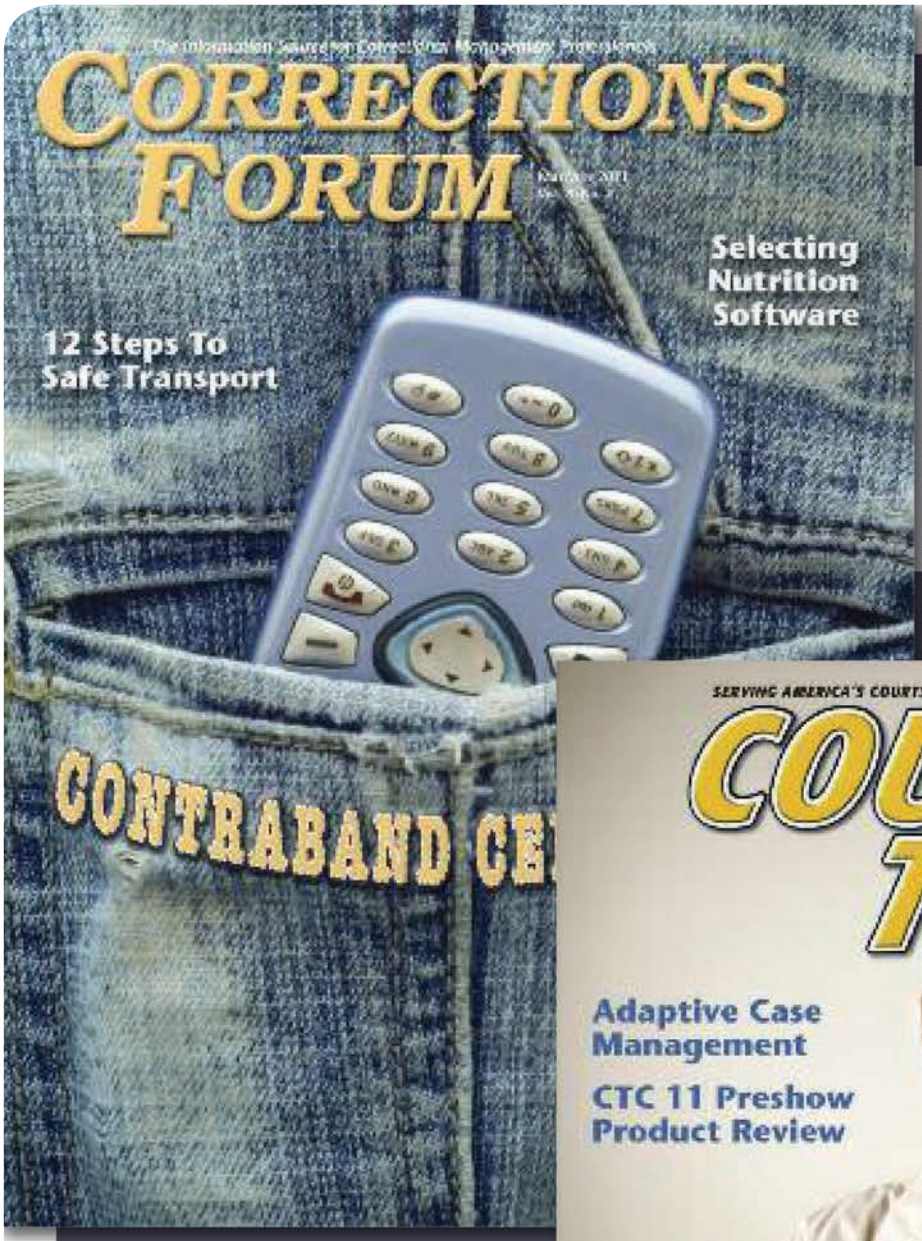
Gangs on reservations in Indian Country are a relatively recent phenomenon, first appearing in the 1980s. A significant increase followed during the 1990s (Major, Egley, Howell, Mendenhall, & Armstrong, 2004). Due in part to their geographic isolation, Indian Country reservation gangs tend to be smaller than traditional street gangs. Many gangs include as few as five members and one survey conducted by Major et al. indicates that most of these reservation gangs have 25 or fewer members. Larger reservation communities (population over 4,000) are more likely

to experience gang activity than smaller communities (Major et al., 2004). The membership of reservation gangs are most often composed of juveniles. In some locations, crime patterns represent a more violent picture of crime which has not historically been associated with Indian Country gangs such as drug distribution, murder, robbery, prostitution, human trafficking and white collar crimes including fraud and money laundering (NGIC, 2011). Criminal enterprise has not been a major characteristic of tribal gangs in the past but it is becoming more a part of the fabric of gang activity (Major et al., 2004) with some outside gang members using Indian Reservations to operate and expand their drug enterprises (NGIC, 2011).

Some gangs on larger reservations mirror the structure of traditional Indian organizational models. Leaders may carry the title of "chief" and members with full status may be known as "warriors."

Geographic isolation tends to limit the recruiting potential of gangs in Indian Country and often results in fragmented, loosely organized structures (Grant, 2013). Usually, these gangs are territorially-oriented and tend to be comprised of individuals with a common relationship bond such as extended family. Some gangs may have no formal "leader" (Pember, 2009). The term "crews" is also used to refer to gang-like organizations on the reservation. While originally used to describe assemblies of young people who gathered regularly to "party," drink and use drugs, some of these crews have moved into criminal activities and have become traditional gangs. The term "crew" even appears in some gang names such as the 420 and 840 Crews on the Pine Ridge reservation (NVPRC, 2006) (Van Dyke & Cuestas, 2006).

Some gangs on larger reservations mirror the structure of traditional Indian organizational models. Leaders may carry the title of "chief" and members with full status may be known as "warriors." They may use traditional symbols such as the medicine wheel and bear paw. They also may adopt traditional native rituals and ceremonies such as pow-wows as a means to attract new young recruits seeking some link to their traditions (McKinney & Norfleet, 2012).



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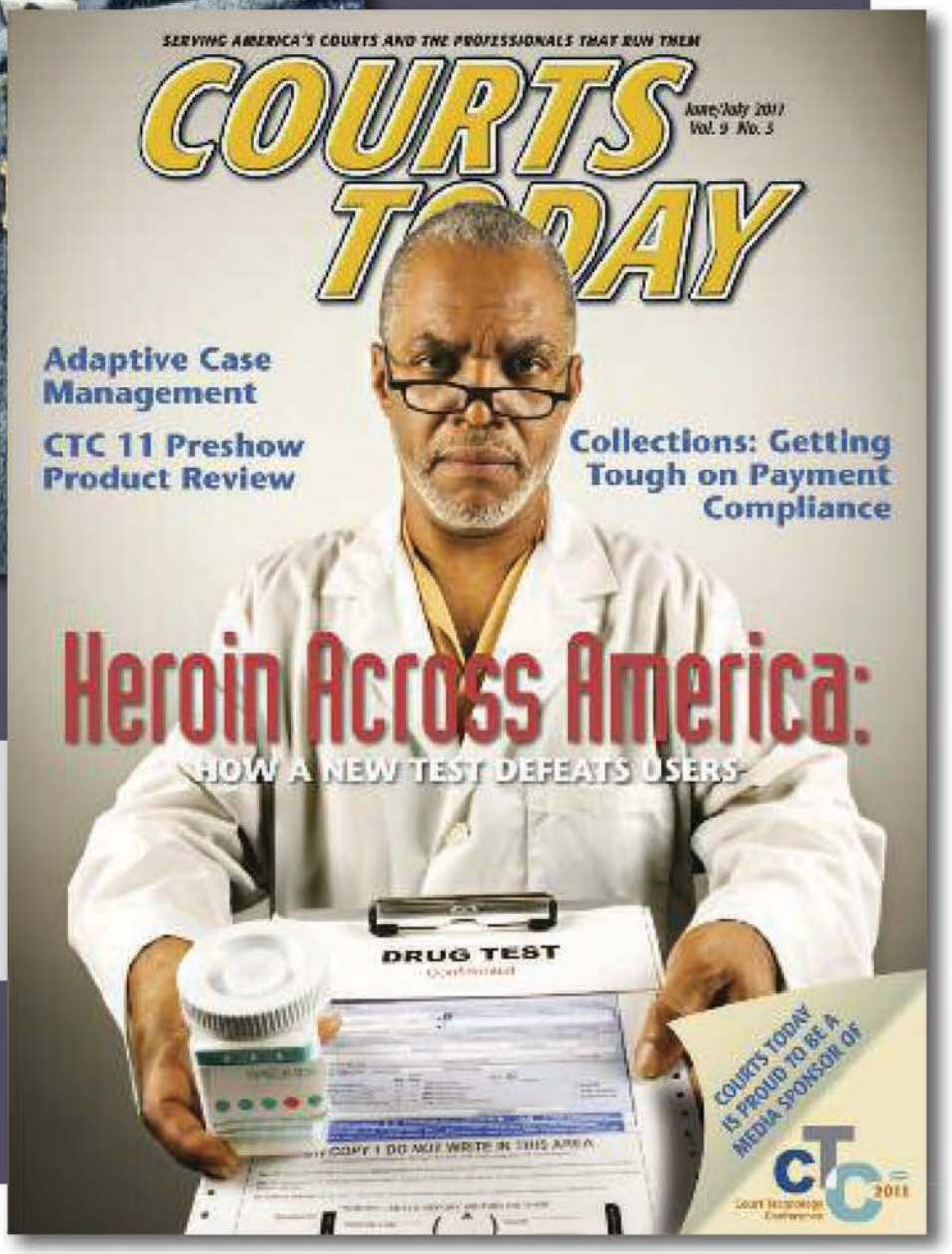

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NATIVE AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN URBAN GANGS

Sixty-four percent of Native American/ Alaskan Natives reside in urban areas and some young people residing in these urban communities have formed gangs similar to those previously established by other racial and ethnic groups such as African Americans, Asians and Hispanics residing in these communities. However, levels of participation and the propensity for violence in Native American gangs has tended to be lower than other urban street gangs (Hailer & Hart, 1999; Hailer, 2008).

Native American gang members may adopt similar identification and communication patterns to those of other urban street gangs. This includes styles of clothing, colors, symbols, hand signs, individual monikers and graffiti symbols unique to a given faction. While tattoos are common among other urban gangs, members of Native American groups tend to utilize branding more frequently (Rogers et al., 2013). Major and his colleagues (2004) found that when an urban area was located in close proximity to tribal lands a cross-over effect occurred; making it difficult to differentiate the specific location of and to accurately measure gang activities.

There is also a high level of mobility between the reservation and urban Indian communities, particularly among young people. The Native Mob and Sovereign Natural Warriors are among some of the Indian gangs that began in an urban setting and continue to have an ongoing, significant urban presence (Grant, 2013).

EMERGING HYBRID GANGS

Gangs are dynamic entities, constantly evolving and changing. One of the manifestations is the emergence of an enhanced type of gang structure that represents the convergence of Native Americans involved in the reservation gang, the urban gang and other criminal entities in the United States; these are referred to as "hybrids." Some "hybrid" gangs are named after and mimic major urban gangs but do not have any direct connection to those gangs. The Tre Tre Crips gang on the Pine Ridge Reservation is a "hybrid" of a large gang of the same name in Denver. The names and structure were brought to the reservation by individuals who were exposed to members of the Denver gang while in prison (NVPRC, 2006).

Prisons are a major force in the "hybridization" of Native American gangs. Some Indian gangs such as the Native American Brotherhood (NAB), Native Nation and the Warrior Society began as prison gangs. Large gangs often have affiliate organizations within prisons (Arizona Department of Corrections, n.d.; Grant, 2013). As individuals return to their home communities from prison, they bring with them their knowledge of the various gangs they have been exposed to in that setting thus "cross-pollinating" the nature of Native American gangs

from one location to another. As pieces from one gang culture are transplanted into another gang culture, the process of "hybridization" expands. The influence of tribal youth living in or visiting the community who have experienced an urban street gang culture also contributes to this "hybridization" process (NVPRC, 2006).

There is some limited penetration of Indian Country gangs by urban gangs. The remote location and sometimes understaffed law enforcement resources on reservations make them prime sites, especially near the Mexican and Canadian borders, for drug smuggling and human trafficking operations (NGIC, 2011). They also provide relatively safe refuge for those urban gang members with a need to "hide out" from law enforcement or rival gang members. The impact of the complex maze of jurisdictional issues which makes prosecution more challenging on the reservation is not lost on these gang members (Pember, 2009). NGIC (2011) also reports that national-level non-Indian gangs such as the Barrio Azteca, Bloods, Crips, Mexican Mafia, Norteños, Sureños, and Juggalos are moving into some reservation settings to expand and facilitate their criminal objectives.

ISSUES UNDERLYING THE EMERGENCE OF NATIVE AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN GANGS

In 1999, Barbara Mendenhall and Troy Armstrong from California State University, Sacramento, undertook a comprehensive study of the gang phenomenon that was occurring in the Navajo Nation that has become a benchmark in understanding the emergence of Native American involvement in gangs. Their research has identified a number of factors:

- Issues disproportionately impacting tribal communities such as poverty, substance abuse issues, domestic abuse and family dysfunction.
- Losses of traditional culture but persistent kinship ties.
- Alienated youth who strongly relate to and identify with other strains of youth culture, especially a "gangsta" identity. Estranged youth are alienated and attracted to the themes of opposition to authority and a proud identity being expressed through provocative music, movies, and television.
- High rates of mobility of families and youth between the reservation and urban areas. This pattern has disrupted connectedness to the tighter reservation community and makes relationships more transient and tentative, disrupting the stability of the family and the

community. Instead of identifying with and being socialized by their family and extended family, these youth may turn to peers and the street where gangs are a major socialization factor and offer a cohesive system of support, recognition, camaraderie and meaningful interaction.

- Shifts in reservation housing configurations that are not consistent with traditional patterns. Housing on reservations has traditionally been dispersed. New housing has been established on a "cluster" basis, thus bringing unrelated individuals into closer proximity to each other and breaking up the solid connections of families and extended families that formed the nucleus of smaller residential groupings that characterized past housing configurations. Traditional points of connectedness to the community were lost, and popular, generic cultural models emerged and became more dominant for young people. Living in cluster housing isolates families and young people from the support and shared resources of other relatives.
- Kinship is important. There continues to be a strong connection between siblings and cousins on the reservation and in urban settings. This relationship is often cited as a reason for joining gangs or joining a specific gang because "all my brothers/sisters/cousins were in it."

Others, including Chris Cuestas, an independent consultant who co-authored the NVPRC report titled "An Assessment of the Pine Ridge Oglala Sioux Tribe's Gangs, Youth Violence, and Drugs" in 2006, have identified similar influences and have added other dynamics that have contributed to the involvement of Native Americans in Indian Country and urban gangs (Van Dyke & Cuestas, 2006; Eckholm, 2009):

- Lack of recreational and social options for young people. The response to this void may be boredom and the propensity to join with other similarly impacted youth, creating bonds and activities which can take the form of gangs. Some at-risk youth are not able to participate in activities because of limited access to transportation.
- The strong influence of a relatively small number of adults active in the larger gang culture that are providing a type of negative "mentorship" to the youth of the community.
- The lack of sufficient positive adult role models in the community.
- The absence of fear of being held accountable for criminal or disruptive behavior in the community. This has resulted from several forces including limited law enforcement resources, adults reluctant to intervene, the acceptance of this type

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of behavior as "normal," and the denial of many adults in the community that a gang presence exists.

- High truancy and school drop-out rates. If students are not present, the school cannot provide a stabilizing influence and provide positive activities and motivation. Dropping out of school also further restricts already limited employment opportunities and perpetuates the cycle of poverty and economic marginalization.
- A sense of alienation and hopelessness that is reflected in a suicide rate for Indian youth that is more than three times the national average.

PROGRAMS SENSITIVE TO THE NEEDS OF NATIVE AMERICANS

This section provides several examples of programs sensitive to the needs of Native Americans. The Ginew Golden Eagle Youth Program, for example, is a Native American youth prevention program.The Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community Program is an adult intervention program for Native American fathers and the Muscogee Nation Reintegration Program targets recidivism of former offenders.

GINEW GOLDEN EAGLE YOUTH PROGRAM

The Ginew Golden Eagle Youth Program, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is designed as a year-round after school program serving American Indian youth ages 5-18. The program follows a 23-unit curriculum that is culturally specific and is designed to embrace and enhance the resiliency of American Indian youth. The goals of the program are to:

- Strengthen the self-esteem and sense of identity of American Indian youth by offering cultural activities.
- Decrease the risk of alcohol and substance abuse by American Indian youth by offering chemical awareness, education involving talking circles, drug awareness, education sessions and chemical-free activities.
- Increase the academic success of American Indian youth through educational programming.
- Increase the physical well-being of American Indian youth by offering recreational activities and health education.

One of the key components of the Ginew Golden Eagle Youth Program is the Indian Youth Study Time which focuses on academic enhancement programs such as the Summer Reading Program and the Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) Learning

Center collaboration for school success and the Challenge to Achieve program. Other essential components include recreation and sports. Youth are provided the opportunity to be involved in team sports and open recreation through guest speakers and teachers.

The Youth Intervention program works with youth, ages 9-18 who have issues with truancy, who are involved in the judicial system, completed a chemical dependency program and/or who have not completed high school.[5]

THE SALT RIVER PIMA-MARICOPA INDIAN COMMUNITY PROGRAM

The Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC) is an adult mentoring program that includes the SRPMIC O'odham Piipaash Fatherhood Program and the Healthy Relationship Program. Both programs support the tribal adults' active participation in their children's lives and their community (Grant, 2013). The program is open to all Native American men and men raising Native American children. The philosophy of the group is that if you are a Native American man, then you are considered a father. Men come together to discuss issues such as gang activity. Many resources and referrals are available through this program including individual counseling, job seeking assistance, job preparation, transportation for job seeking and some housing services.

The Healthy Relationships Program is a family-based skill-building program designed to provide men and women information, support and assistance in creating strong and healthy relationships. The ultimate goal is building a healthy and safe environment for their children.[6]

THE MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION REINTEGRATION PROGRAM

The Muscogee (Creek) National Reintegration Program was established in 2004 as a result of growing concerns over the number of tribal members who recidivate after being released from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

This program involves a high degree of understanding, cooperation and accountability, through culturally focused wraparound reentry practices. The conditions of reentry reinforce the practice of individual responsibility for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Community (MCN). The program supports a celebration of success and accomplishment for the individual's positive contributions toward family and spiritual growth. Program participants are encouraged to embrace their traditions to facilitate positive change.

Qualified participants for the MCN Reintegration Program must meet the following criteria:

- Native American with tribal membership
- Must be living within the MCN tribal jurisdiction

- Have 6-12 months left on sentence
- Have minor children in immediate family, or be of child-bearing age
- Must be dealing with drug or alcohol dependency

Initial outcomes for the 115 MCN releases who entered the program in 2010 were positive. Only 12 of the 115 individuals released in 2010 failed to complete the reentry program and re-offended (Grant, 2013).[7]

FINAL REMARKS

Among the roles of the probation officer is to serve as a resource to assist tribal officials, tribal elders and others concerned with community members' ability to identify potential prevention and intervention programs; to assist in the development and initiation of these programs; to support the programs with the officers' expertise; and to make appropriate referrals of individuals who are identified in the course of their work as being at-risk. The probation officer is uniquely positioned to not only supervise the probationer, but to offer guidance to the family as well. Such referrals could be preventative or intervention-oriented in nature.

Probation may also partner with law enforcement for added protection and legitimacy when conducting home visits (Kim, Matz, Gerber, Beto, & Lambert, 2013; Matz, DeMichele, & Lowe, 2012; Matz & Kim, 2013). Police officers can serve as additional eyes on the street during the course of their regular patrols and alert the supervising officer of potential technical violations. Specifically, law enforcement can conduct curfew checks on behalf of the probation agency (e.g., Jones & Sigler, 2002). They can also inform the supervising officer of gang activity in the community as well as popular locations where youth congregate, even conducting joint patrols in such areas in a systematic fashion. Laws and statutes vary by state and this may be especially unique for Native American lands, but by being knowledgeable of probationers in the community, law enforcement can often conduct legal searches of the probationers' person or property without the need for a warrant or *probable cause* (by articulating a *reasonable suspicion* of criminal activity) (Hemmens, Turner, & Matz, 2014).[8] Simply put, working with law enforcement can have many advantages for probation as well as police.

That said, it is imperative probation officers play a critical role in prevention, intervention and suppression efforts. This is accomplished through enforcement of the terms and conditions of supervision, performing risk and need assessments, establishing regular contacts, utilizing sanctions to respond to violations and incentives to respond to positive compliance and accomplishments, and making referrals to appropriate community service providers. By working in cooperation with other community resources such as schools, Indian child

welfare, social service agencies, public health services, and local program and activity providers, probation agencies can be more effective (Cobb, Mowatt, & Mullins, 2013; Cobb et al., 2011; Cobb & Mullins, 2010). Further, Native American communities are rich in history, tradition, culture and strong tribal values. These values can be powerful influences on the probationer and can be built into the supervision plan by the community supervision officer (Grant, 2013).

Common terms and conditions for gang members who are on probation should include curfew restrictions, geographic exclusion (areas known for gang activity), do-not-associate clauses and internet usage agreements aimed at separating the probationer from their gang-involved peers. New trends should be identified such as the use of the internet by gangs and incorporated into the terms and conditions of probation supervision. Restricting certain behaviors and activities and the ability to recommend to the court that an individual be removed from the community (incarceration) are primary features of this authority and responsibility.

Being a probation officer with a caseload involving gang-affiliated Native Americans should be augmented with a unique set of interventions and resources pertinent to this unique population whenever possible. As prescribed by the responsivity principle of RNR (Taxman & Thanner, 2006), treatment modalities should consider the unique needs of the probationer. For some, Native American culture may be especially important and desistance-enabling, but for others on Native American lands it may be inappropriate. Nonetheless, officers should be aware that Native American gang members exist across the country on reservations and in urban areas. They may be integrated with mix-ethnic gangs or secluded to like-minded disadvantaged Native American youth. Strategies need to be tailored to the unique needs of a given community, but core principles of other programs, as described previously, should be adopted when applicable. ▷▷▲

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ENDNOTES

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2 Mary Ann Mowatt and Adam K. Matz are both research associates with the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA).

3 Actual estimates of the number of Indian gangs members is difficult to locate. This figure, 28,000, was determined by using the FBI's estimate of 1.4 million gangs members nationwide X .02 representing the percentage listed as racial/ethnic "other" by OJJDP and then X .45 which reflects OJJDP's estimate of the percentage of the "other" category represented by Indian gang members.

4 When considering the characteristics, activities, and etiology of tribal gangs, it must be recognized that, while almost all tribal communities share some common issues and challenges, each community is unique. What describes gangs or explains the gang issues on one reservation or within one Nation or one urban community may not be applicable to another.

5 Additional information regarding this program can be found at http://www.maicnet.org/programs/ginewgolden-eagle/

6 Additional information regarding the SRPMIC program can be found by visiting http://www.srpmic-nsn.gov/government/

7 Additional information can be found at http://mcnrip.com/index.php/services/assement-information

8 Agencies should work with their legal counsel to determine the appropriate parameters for permitting law enforcement to conduct searches of probationers without a warrant or probable cause. States vary and there is no guidance available specifically pertaining to Indian Country across the U.S.

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