



CULTURALLY RELEVANT SERVICES FOR TRIBAL COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

We need to have an honest conversation about the effectiveness of culturally specific services provided to sexual assault survivors and the outreach strategies for our communities. We hope to spark a conversation about what those services should look like, how we can center the needs of marginalized people to create effective sexual assault services, and most importantly, the ways that we can value our own strategies and techniques instead of replicating mainstream methods ineffective for our communities.

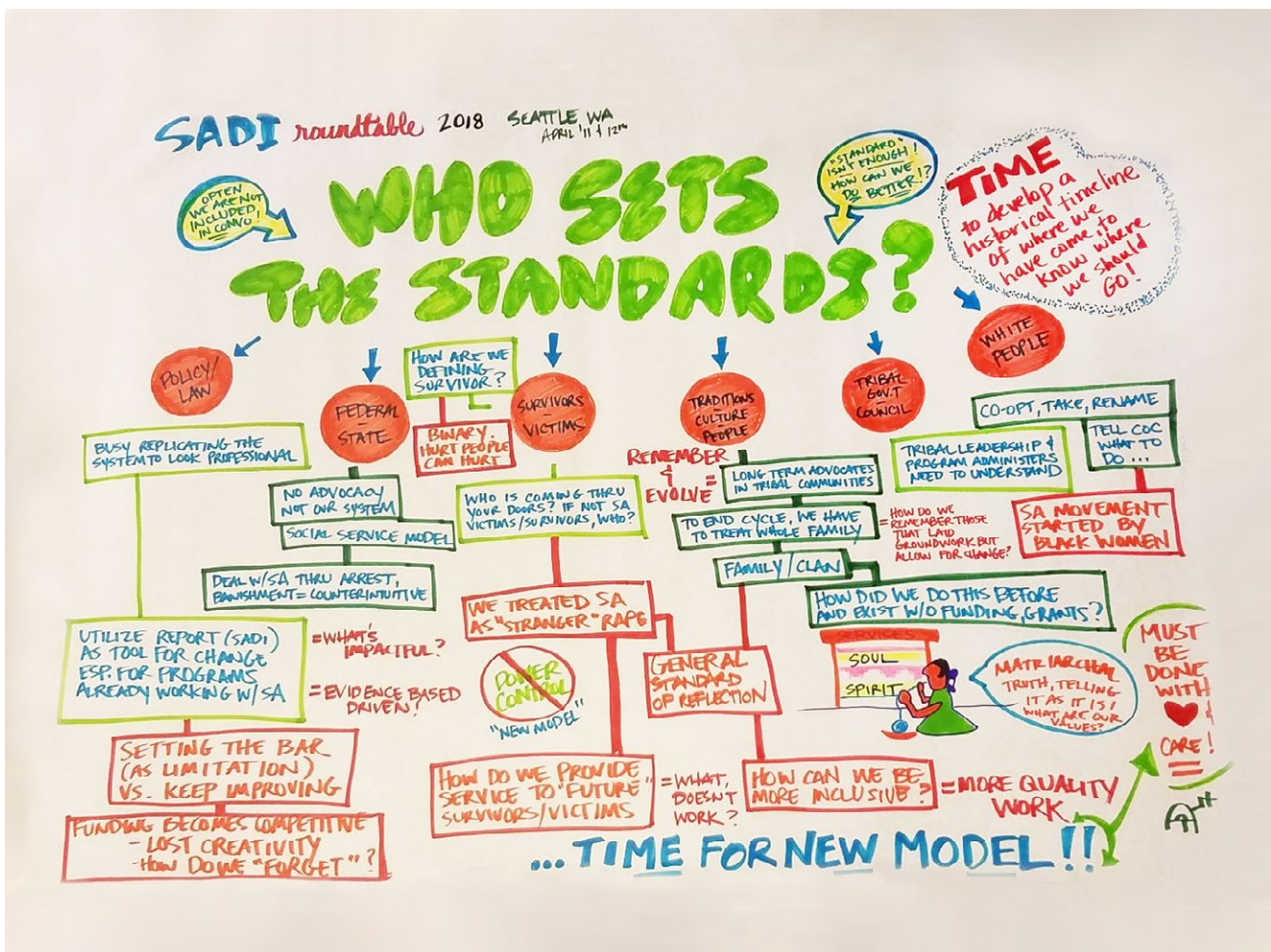
We have been engaged in this work for years, and we know that the majority of our communities have been colonized, enslaved, or violently displaced, and are constantly targeted for violence. However, our people have survived. In particular, the women and girls in our communities have survived sexual violence amid the ensuing trauma and further victimization. Culturally specific programs have been developing innovative services to create spaces for victim disclosures and healing, but there has been a tendency to disregard or discount culturally specific practices. Tribal and culturally specific strategies are often dismissed by the mainstream as not evidence-based, perpetuating the belief that mainstream approaches are the only right way to provide services to sexual assault survivors. Our communities have been historically left out of the dialogue on best practices. We want to remind ourselves that we are the authority on the answers to help our communities; we have to raise every voice among us to help heal and transform our people.

In April 2018, twenty-four advocates/community experts from the Tribal communities and communities of color gathered in Seattle to discuss the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) Sexual Assault Demonstration Initiative (SADI) Report. The SADI Project began in 2009 to help dual community-based advocacy programs strengthen their services to survivors of sexual violence. Two of the project sites serve Tribal communities and communities of color — Gila River and New York Asian Women’s Center (now Womankind). Three national organizations — Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition (MIWSAC), National Organization of Asians & Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Violence (NAPIESV), and Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA) — were consultants on the SADI Project. In 2017, a [full report](#) on the lessons learned from the project was published, and in 2018, three roundtable discussions were organized to further the discussion on sexual assault advocacy.



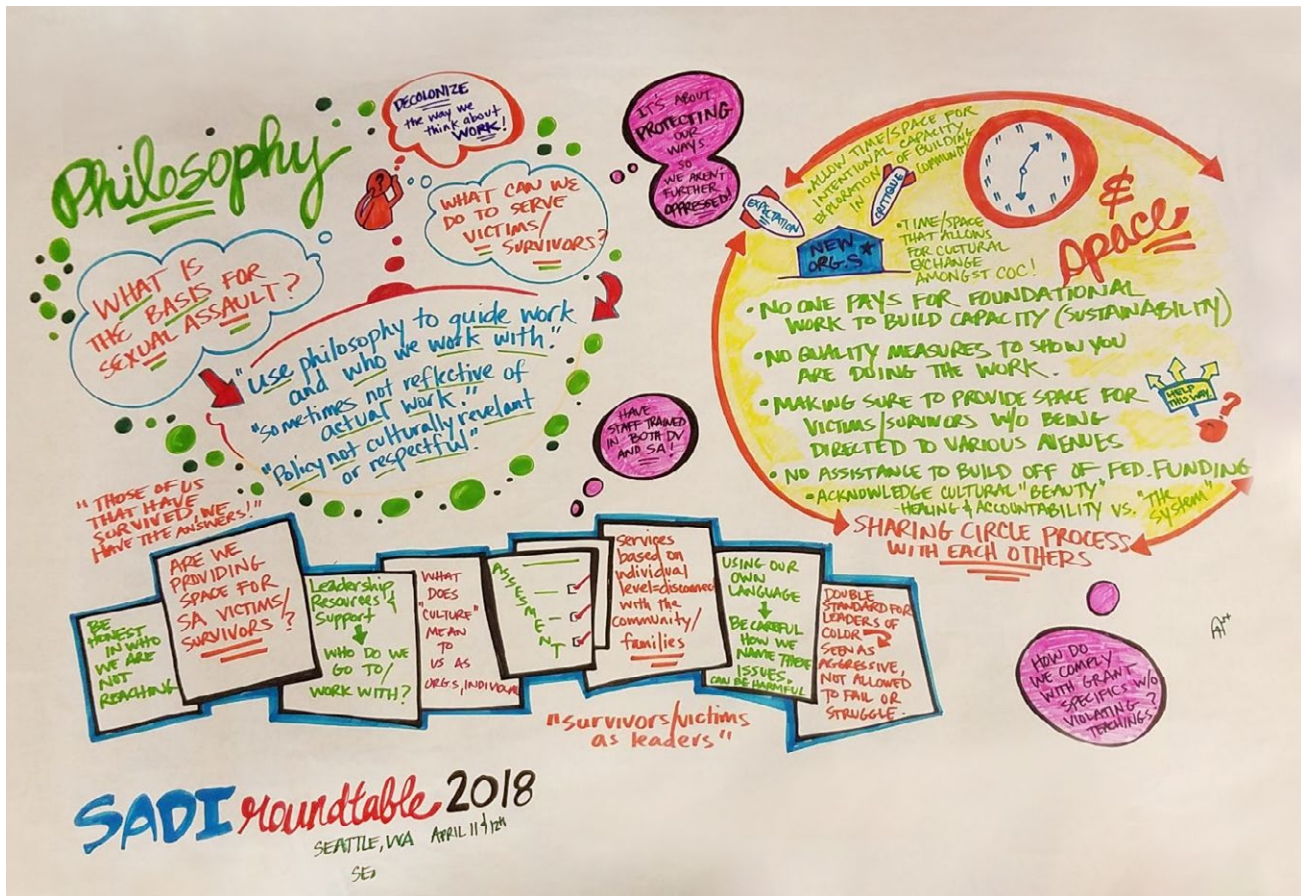
WHO SETS THE STANDARDS?

The roundtable participants in April 2018 immediately kindled a difficult debate over the question of who sets the standards for the work we do. Should we think differently from the mainstream? How do we assist relatives? What happens when we do not encounter “perfect victims”? At the onset, the group indicated that communities of color would benefit greatly by talking to one another more frequently. The participants pondered the ways that Tribal communities and communities of color could work together, decolonize our practices, and value each other and our endeavors. This conversation also raised the importance of including anti-Blackness in our work over concerns about how often non-Black people of color perpetuate anti-Blackness in their respective communities.



One of the participants pointed out the need “to allow each other to diversify — to find ways for communities of color to compete for funding with one another but also talk and work with one another on our own terms.” Everyone agreed that competing for financial support has led to distrust and unhealthy rivalry that divides communities instead of encouraging community partnerships. One participant believed that Tribal communities and communities of color are “too busy teaching White people to see us, that we don’t see each other.” Based on many similar concerns about isolation and neglect, we argue that Tribal communities and communities of color must return to creating spaces where we can learn from one another and work together.

Also crucial is using models from Tribal communities and communities of color as templates for our work. Instead of replicating mainstream programming, we should instead explore programming created by indigenous communities and use it as a framework to strengthen our programs. We must be intentional in centering Tribal and indigenous models of services. In addition, it is essential to highlight the struggles and successes of Black women who headed the anti-rape movement in our re-vision. We argue for a return to embracing the spirit of the people who came before us to do this work. As we begin to co-create our own standards, the wisdom of our elders



and the passion of our youth are critical for a robust integration. It is important for us to recognize also that Tribal communities and communities of color have culturally specific knowledge and insights to help rebuild efficient and effective strategies to prevent sexual violence.

Overall, the SADI Report resonated with all participants, who were in agreement about the programming for intervention and prevention of sexual violence being rooted in the needs of survivors and their communities and about requiring that the report be used mainly as a guide and resource.

PHILOSOPHY = HEAD. CORE VALUES = HEART.

We contend that the philosophy and core values of mainstream programming do not match those of Tribal communities and communities of color, each of whom has their own teachings that help guide their work. Therefore, the first step would require us to be clear about our philosophy and core values, which would then help inform the design and direction of the program. But this is usually not the case currently — our core values are often scarce or not even considered when setting up sexual assault programming, and instead mainstream practices are appropriated unthinkingly.

When reviewing our philosophy and core values, let us examine the differences and the similarities between what constitutes culturally relevant and culturally specific. Are they synonymous? For some, culturally relevant is a fluid concept and cannot be generalized. Programs sometimes also have difficulties explaining what culturally specific practices are because they are not backed by what is regarded as empirical evidence.




SO WHAT SHOULD CULTURALLY SPECIFIC SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAMS LOOK LIKE?

As we discussed culturally relevant programming at the roundtable, participants shared experiences from their communities. For instance, a participant said that in the Lao community, there is a proverb: “Listen to the grass before you run.” This prompted us to consider the value of observation and paying attention in the work we do. The Lao saying can be used as a mindfulness method in providing services to victims, making it an excellent example of how our community practices can inform our work.



The roundtable discussion then shifted to healing. The goal of sexual violence advocacy is the healing of the survivor as well as the community. In Tribal communities and communities of color, the healing of the individual cannot be separated from that of the family and the community. What then would such healing look like? Tribal communities and communities of color have experienced and continue to experience state-sanctioned violence in particular, so "healing" every day is vital for survival. As a result, when an individual has survived sexual violence, it is difficult to report or to document this occurrence in ways expected by a program's financial backers. In mainstream programming, according to a roundtable participant, healing means "talking about your traumatic experience in a number of sessions, then after those sessions, you will no longer need us, don't look at the trauma since it gone."

Healing for Tribal communities and communities of color cannot be determined by the number of therapy sessions a victim has attended. It is more deep-seeded: We want



to emphasize here the role of racial justice in such kind of recovery because for Tribal communities and communities of color sexual violence is also racialized. That requires us to look at healing more intensively based on the varied experiences of violence for different communities. In addition, roundtable participants also described healing as a “circle.” But visualizing this will need further exploration. Therefore, we would all have to devise appropriate and restorative language in this process that accurately names and validates our experiences.

The roundtable participants’ discussion then progressed to what justice would look like for a sexual assault victim in Tribal communities and communities of color. The impact of sexual violence is not only on the victim but also on the victim’s family and community. To address the violence, participants surmised that Tribal communities and communities of color could possibly already have relied on restorative justice or transformative justice but without naming it as such. Do we then have the language to conduct such sessions effectively? One of the participants stated that they had no specific terms for domestic violence, sexual violence, or human trafficking in their language, adding that there is great power for victims in such naming. Another participant declared that “we also need to shift our language; instead of ‘anti-’ we should [use] words that are more positive and [reflect] our mission.”

It was also acknowledged that the act of seeking justice for survivors of sexual violence should not rest on the shoulders of the survivors. In Tribal communities and communities of color, the “work” includes helping survivors and their support networks, as well as seeking to change systems that keep justice out of reach. It is, therefore, time for us to start setting the standards for justice without fear of being treated unequally or being devalued because our solutions look different from those of mainstream programs.

An important component of the roundtable discussion about core values was self-care, particularly for individuals working with victims. The experiences of historical and impending oppression result in Tribal communities and communities of color viewing self-care in a totally different light. Our self-care is not only for the present, but also for the past and the future.



CONSIDERATIONS & ACTIONS

FUNDING

There are limitations and challenges with acquiring financial resources. Funding solicitations focusing on Tribal Communities and Communities of Color should be revised to reflect the communities. For example, a request for proposals that can potentially fund programming in the Tribal communities and U.S. Territories have requirements that cause barriers in applying.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

How do we support one another meaningfully? How do we keep the energy alive and well? As we continue to build, it is important to remember that while our needs may differ — for example, the needs of communities of color in Guam will differ from the needs of communities of color in New York City — our issues are connected to other forms of violence, such as racial, environmental, and economic, among others.



CORE VALUES FOR CULTURALLY SPECIFIC SERVICES

The roundtable participants continued to reiterate the gravity of core values. In our opinion, our programs' core values would work best if we base them on the values we practice in our communities. We discussed, for example, the importance of moving beyond initial safety planning to creating space for just listening. Another suggestion that came up was strengthening the victim's support network.

Some core values the group shared:

- Grandfather's teachings — love, humility, and truth
- Nature and environmental — answer to our illnesses and issues
- Knowledge — knowledge that we bring and knowledge about each other
- Acknowledging our stories and where we come from — where does it fit? Having that knowledge, knowing that it exists
- One family — abusers who are part of our family and safe way to work with our families
- Value of decolonizing process — how do we do that? Defining decolonization.
- Respect
- Traditional values — Hopi
- Our values — our community and reciprocity
- When we think about our work — interconnectedness of work and home
- Identifying the environment
- How do we define community, decolonize?
- African diaspora — creating core values — for example, Kwanzaa
- When you lose something, it's hard to get it back
- Reframing self-care: we are from hard-working cultures.
- Creativity that is needed to do this. When we are so busy, we need to be creative. Truly be our creative selves. Spaciousness in being creative
- Honor our matriarchal traditions — part of our maternal, matrilineal teaching. Everyone comes from the mother. Circle/cycle. Not just biology. Inclusion of trans people
- If we are talking about decolonization, how do we bring in faith? Decolonizing our work — part of faith has been transformed from matrilineal to patrilineal. How do we engage or challenge it?
- Faith — representation of faith in the work from the native community — the use of circle, to all my relations. Faith in all my relations. Decolonizing for Samoan communities — family is broad. You see the matriarch in the family — all of them are my mothers. How the system works — we will be able to make those changes.

Hypermasculinity in prison. LGBTQ issues — homophobia and transphobia — we contribute to our own oppressions. Decolonizing anti-Blackness and homophobia

- Power and control, patriarchy — We have been dodging systems to keep power and control. If we are dodging it, it will not change. But if we use matriarchy, love and care will be centered. Internalized oppression — we will continue the anger and hate
- Creating a new “circle”/a “wheel”

In reviewing the SADI Project values, the participants expressed their opinions:

- They are coming from a “White lens”
- Positive instead of anti-blackness + settler colonialism – the power of naming and making it to being. Wordsmithing. Instead of anti-blackness – what other word do we use that is positive?
- We are so busy working with the violence that we don’t know how to do the work without it
- We often do not know what it looks like since we never knew what could have been because of our experience of colonization. Part of our work is to decolonize. There are communities that are still occupied, for example, Puerto Rico and Guam. Colonization had replaced indigenous institutions violently. How do we make sure that we don’t continue the harm as we do the work? Take efforts in how to decolonize because rape was used as a tool to subjugate. Rape culture is so real for community. Colonization is still happening in our mind, behaviors, in our community [through gentrification]
- Our existence is so political [Tribal community]

What would we like to see?

- Reports should be more testimonials, not narratives. Collecting testimonials is crucial
- Not allowing our children to be adultified/adultification, especially for the Black community
- What are the possibilities? Visioning of what is next? Decolonizing effort. More expansive of our effort
- See a monthly sharing of information – starting with people with this group the history of their work, their community. Nothing really organized. Monthly webinar effort. Learn more from each other
- Storytelling effort
- First-person narrative – capture those stories
- Strategies that are innovative. For example, the Asian Prisoners Network organizing a funders event; creating request for proposals with input from the community; community organizations to identify and engage community

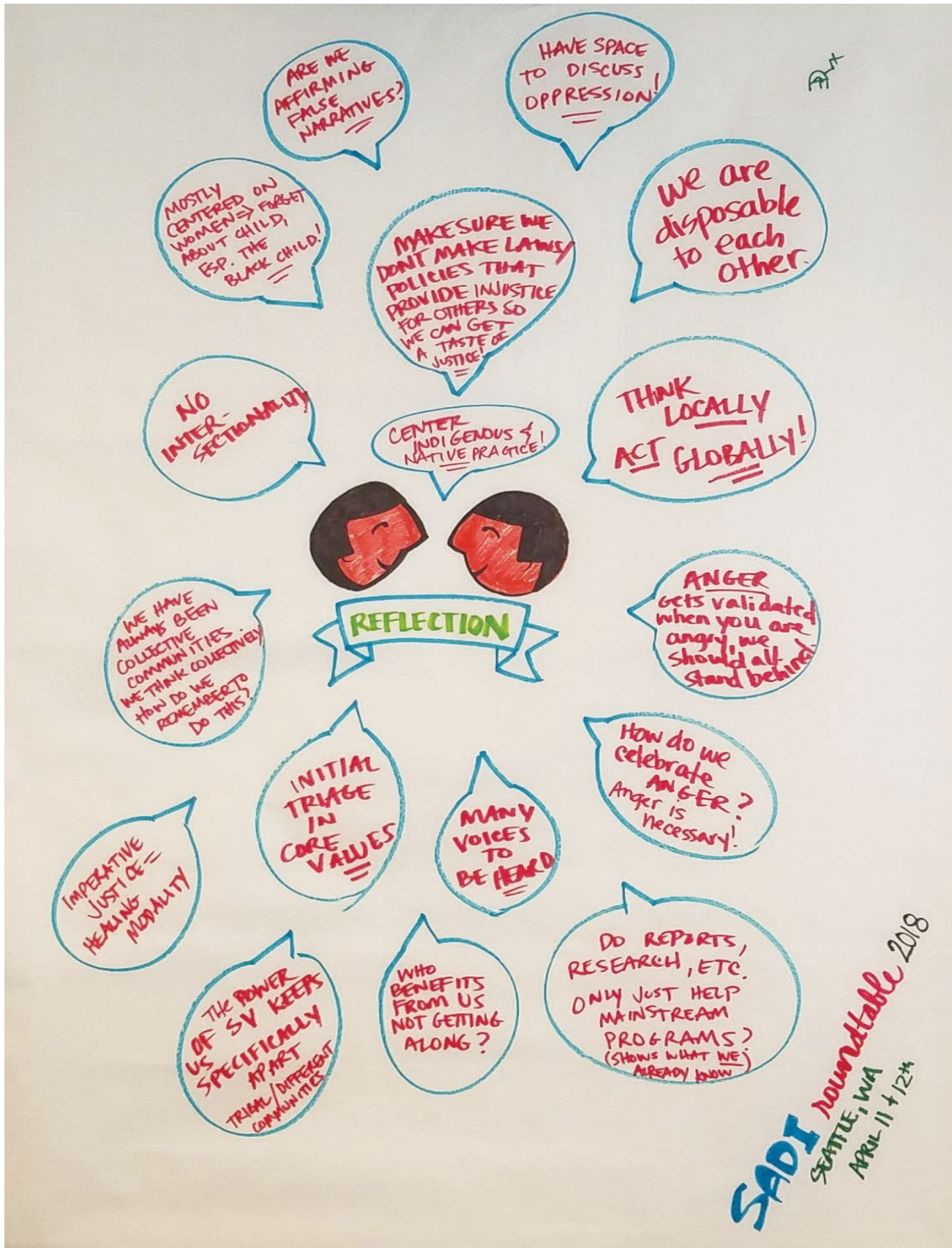
- No failure but lessons learned. What could have been done better?
- Meeting not only nationally but also regionally
- Need to focus on prevention especially with children and youth
- Inclusion of men and women who are incarcerated
- Education in schools
- Create a list of experts
- Support U.S. Territories, for example, Guam. How do we support Guam? There is a need to include more Pacific Islanders in the different spaces
- Feeling disconnected — is this a bigger discussion with a bigger movement? The bigger movement is a bit toxic. Do we do this as marginalized or trying to make a change in the bigger system? Both — doing our work together and connection to the bigger movement
- Webinar ideas
- Long term: organizing a conference
- Professional development – share ideas – filling-each-other vessels – what does it look like? Movement making, breaking the silos, in conversation with each other, building with each other
- Building relationships with each other



WORDS OF WISDOM FOR OUR YOUNGER SELVES

- Don't do it
- Still here
- It will be okay
- Self-care is not only for old people but also for younger folks
- I did a good job
- Balance is key, so if you hear stories, think of the resilience stories
- There is not just one answer, we all have it.
- Set boundaries
- Talk about the unspeakable; if you don't have the courage, don't. Because if you did, people might hurt you
- Trust your gut feeling
- Be yourself
- Trusting in yourself, trust your intuition, be yourself
- Don't let them kill you, bring them along
- Thank you. Forgive yourself. Enjoy what you do

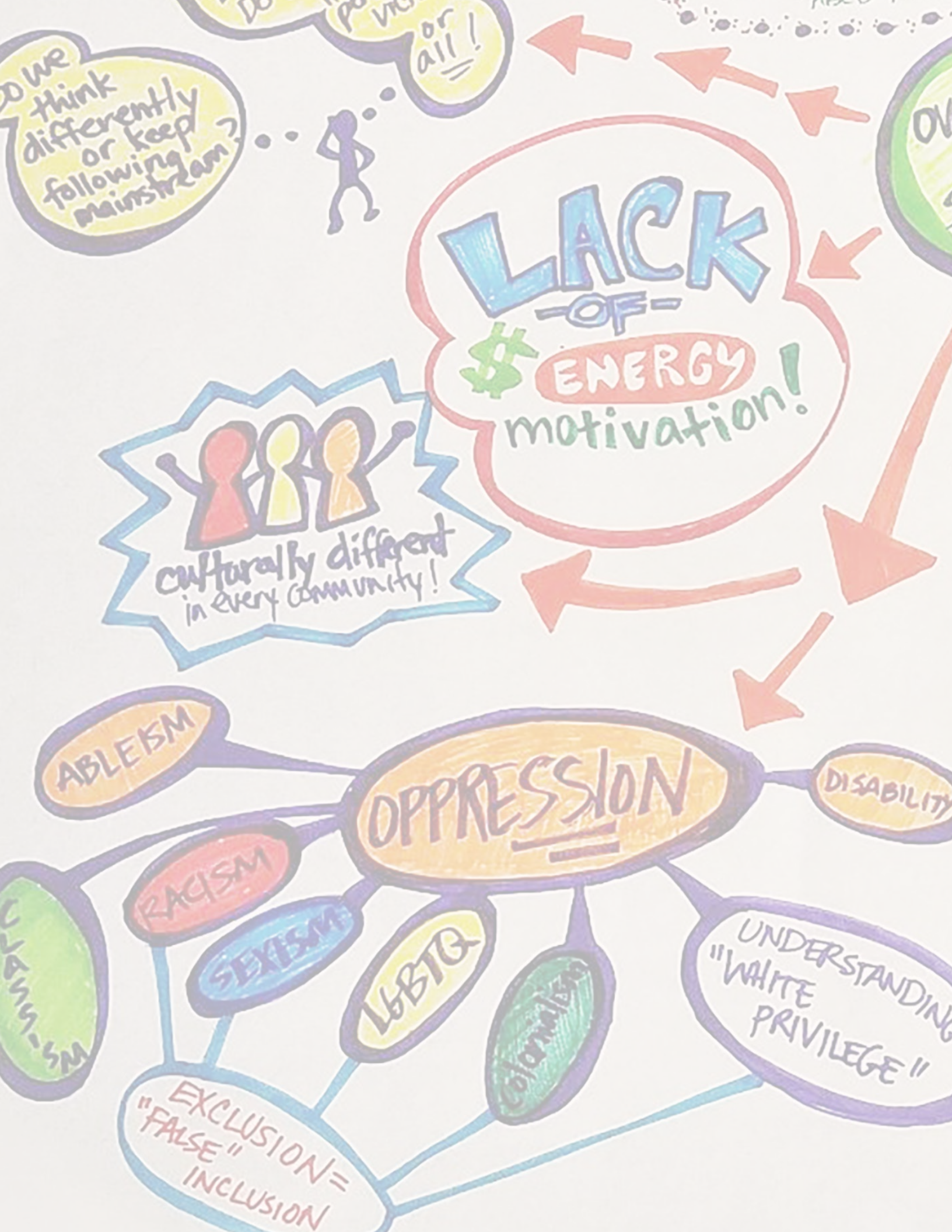
In conclusion, the roundtable group agreed that “Band-Aids” and plugging leaks should be things of the past when addressing sexual violence in Tribal communities and communities of color. Forging new paths is imperative because it will change the course of not only oppressions that remain unchallenged but also of healing that is holistic. The first action may require going back to the basics: Have coffee with a person or group who shares your vision. That simple move has the potential to inspire a powerful wave of strategizing for peace and social change. And that does not require any funding.



SADI ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION WITH TRIBAL COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR PARTICIPANTS

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LACK

ENERGY

motivation!

culturally different
in every community!

OPPRESSION

ABLEISM

DISABILITY

RACISM

SEXISM

LGBTQ

Colonialism

UNDERSTANDING
"WHITE
PRIVILEGE"

EXCLUSION =
"FALSE"
INCLUSION

CLASSISM

DOY
do!!

PACE
YOURSELF

LOVE & THANK & FORGIVE YOURSELF!
GREAT JOB!
THANK YOU!



Balance is key!

Trust yourself!

"SELF CARE"
IS NOT JUST
FOR OLD
PEOPLE!

HAVE THE
COURAGE TO
SPEAK THE
UNSPEAKABLE!

connect with
others!

BE YOURSELF
WITH YOUR
HEART...



TRUST
YOURSELF

There is always...

SAD