

# Tribal Sexual Assault Services Program

The Tribal Sexual Assault Services Program (T-SASP) was created by VAWA 2005, and is the first federal funding stream dedicated solely to developing culturally relevant services that are specifically responsive to sexual assault victims within tribal communities. Because tribes reflect great diversity of history, geographic location, language, socioeconomic conditions, and retention of traditional spiritual and cultural practices, the T-SASP tribal grantees are strongly encouraged to incorporate cultural and traditional practices (e.g. talking circles, healing ceremonies, and sweat lodges) for those who have been sexually victimized.

**THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF T-SASP IS TO ESTABLISH, MAINTAIN, AND expand culturally specific intervention and related assistance for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) victims of sexual assault. Grantees are Indian tribes, tribal government organizations, and nonprofit tribal organizations. They provide intervention, advocacy, accompaniment (e.g. accompanying victims to court, medical facilities, and police departments), support services, and related assistance for adult, youth, and child victims of sexual assault; non-offending family and household members of victims; and those collaterally affected by sexual assault.**

## 38 Grantees Reporting

Between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2019, 38 unique grantees reported activities funded by the T-SASP Program.

## 565 Victims Served

On average, grantees served 565 victims during each 6-month reporting period.

## 288 Secondary Victims Served

On average, grantees served 288 secondary victims during each 6-month reporting period.

*Many Native Americans do not live near a facility offering SANE or SART services. Research shows gaps in sexual assault services and coverage for more than two-thirds of Native American lands, and some communities have no coverage at all. Efforts are underway to improve interagency coordination and develop tribal-centric SARTs to address the particular needs of AI/AN victims of sexual violence. These efforts were facilitated by the SDVCJ provisions of VAWA 2013 (Deer, 2017; Juraska et al., 2014).*





*In order to build the base of knowledge regarding the experiences of Native women, including their experiences of sexual violence and help-seeking, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is conducting the National Baseline Study: A Study of Health, Wellness, and Safety of American Indian and Alaska Native Women Living in Tribal Communities. This study is intended to provide reliable data to inform policy reform as well as prevention and intervention methods that will better serve AI/AN people and communities. For more information on this important research see: <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/violence-against-indian-women-national-baseline-study>.*



#### **Tribal • Grantee Perspective**

Without our T-SASP funds our clients would not have access to mental health care following sexual assault; cultural healing through events, materials, and support groups; nor would they have the quality of care needed to walk them through their processes. Without a worker dedicated to addressing sexual assault in our community our program would have limited power to fully engage and respond to individuals' needs. Having someone to talk to, to ask for help, to utilize for assessing their needs in the systems they run into, is invaluable. Our TSASP coordinator is able to respond in a culturally specific manner meaning that they center their response on our connectedness to one another as tribal people.

**CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF SILETZ INDIANS**

VAWA 2013 added the following new purpose area to this program:

- Address the needs of youth victims, including providing support to their non-abusing parent or caretaker.

In addition, VAWA 2013 clarified that victim services and legal assistance include services and assistance to **victims of domestic/sexual violence who are also victims of severe forms of trafficking in persons.**

These changes were implemented in FY 2014, meaning that grants made on or after October 1, 2014 could specifically address them. If an activity falling under the added purpose area could not be captured in sections of the existing form that grantees use to report, they could describe their accomplishments in narrative sections of the form.

## General Grant Information

Information for this report was submitted by **38** individual grantees for the July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2019 progress reporting period.

## Staff

Grant-funded staff primarily establish, maintain, and expand coordinated community responses within their catchment areas, and provide victim services, including advocacy, crisis intervention, legal assistance, court and hospital accompaniment, and transportation. **Being able to hire staff is critical to the overall function and success of programs.**

- **38** (100%) grantees used funds for staffing needs.
- Grantees funded an average of **30** full-time equivalent (FTE) staff during each 6-month period.
- Grantees most often used these staffing funds to support victim advocates, administrators, and program coordinators.

**Table 1** | Staff supported with T-SASP grant funds, July 2017–June 2019: Selected groups

Staff funded	6-month average	
<b>Total FTE staff funded</b>	<b>30</b>	
Victim advocates	<b>18</b>	<b>60%</b>
Administrators	<b>3</b>	<b>10%</b>
Program coordinators	<b>3</b>	<b>10%</b>
Counselors	<b>2</b>	<b>7%</b>

**NOTE:** Data presented for the most frequently reported categories only (≥5%).

## Victim Services

Grantees address the specific cultural needs of AI/AN victims, and may provide crisis intervention; safety planning; services such as legal advocacy, medical, and counseling services from healthcare professionals; and accompaniment to forensic exams and to court. **These comprehensive support services address a wide variety of needs to help victims become and remain safe from violence.**

- **38** (100%) grantees used funds for victim services.
- Grantees provided services to an average of **565** victims during each 6-month period.
- **98%** of victims who sought services received them during each 6-month period.

On average, during each 6-month reporting period, T-SASP grantees provided services to **565 INDIVIDUALS.**

Services include:

348  
individuals received  
**SUPPORT GROUPS/  
COUNSELING**

295  
individuals received  
**VICTIM  
ADVOCACY**

290  
individuals received  
**CRISIS  
INTERVENTION**

196  
individuals received  
**TRANSPORTATION  
SERVICES**



2,996  
**VICTIM-WITNESS  
NOTIFICATION/VICTIM  
OUTREACH SERVICES**



2,593  
**HOTLINE CALLS**

## Victims Seeking Services

Grantees serve victims of sexual assault.

**Table 2** | Victims seeking services with T-SASP grant funds, July 2017–June 2019

Victims seeking services	6-month average	
<b>Total victims seeking services</b>	<b>576</b>	
Victims served	<b>556</b>	<b>97%</b>
Victims partially served	<b>9</b>	<b>2%</b>
Victims not served	<b>10</b>	<b>2%</b>

**NOTE:** "Partially served" represents victims who received some but not all of the service(s) they requested, provided those services were funded under the T-SASP grant. "Not served" represents victims who sought services and did not receive the service(s) they were seeking, provided those services were funded under the T-SASP grant.

*Taboos on speaking about sexuality, fear of engaging non-Native criminal justice and social services systems, and hesitancy to name respected community members as abusers for fear of the consequences are all rooted in histories of colonization and impact the likelihood of disclosure and help-seeking by AI/AN victims of sexual violence. Limited jurisdiction also inhibits the provision of justice in cases of sexual assault and child abuse in Alaska Native communities and throughout Indian Country. Many AI/AN domestic/sexual violence advocacy organizations have developed practices that acknowledge these histories and address them using traditional ways of healing and building community, while also exploring alternative methods for holding offenders accountable (Braithwaite, 2018; Deer, 2017, 2018; Mending the Sacred Hoop, n.d.).*



### Tribal • Grantee Perspective



Prior to T-SASP funding, advocacy services for children impacted by sexual abuse were extremely limited or non-existent within our community. Often families had to endure the criminal process with little to no support. T-SASP funding has made it possible for families who have been impacted by sexual violence to receive child advocacy services. Our data shows that there has been a steady increase of child sexual assault victims who are requesting and benefiting from advocacy services offered through Family Violence Prevention Program. The Child Advocate provides complex services that would not be available without T-SASP funding. This funding provides our program with a fully dedicated Child Advocate who is able to work with the child and non-offending parent by providing a variety of advocacy and supportive services. The implementation of the T-SASP project has significantly increased support for child survivors and their families.

### MUSCOGEE CREEK NATION

### Tribal • Grantee Perspective



The funding has allowed us to hire a full-time Sexual Assault Advocate. The position was able to provide 100% of her time to providing services to victims of sexual assault and those collaterally affected. Due to the historical violence our People have faced, it has become too common that our women and men have been sexually violated at young ages from people they should have been able to trust. The funding has allowed us to open the door to allow our People a chance at healing.

### PYRAMID LAKE PAIUTE TRIBE



A recent NIJ study showed that more than one in seven (14.4%) American Indian and Alaska Native women had experienced sexual violence in the past year. AI/AN women are also much more likely than any other racial group to experience violence perpetrated by someone of a different race (Deer, 2018; Mending the Sacred Hoop, n.d.; Rosay, 2016).



#### Tribal • Grantee Perspective

Prior to receiving the T-SASP funding, the department did not provide services to children under 13, so if a parent was seeking services for their children due to a sexual assault, that family would need to be referred to services outside of the Tribal Behavioral Health. Now, children of all ages are able to access sexual assault treatment within the department. Additionally, therapy is provided in a modality that is non-threatening and is more aligned with a child's natural way of expressing and processing, which is play and creativity. Individuals who have experienced sexual trauma may be reluctant to begin mental health treatment because they report finding it too overwhelming to talk about what happened. By utilizing a non-verbal approach to treatment, child and adult clients are able to process the trauma effectively in a manner that is acceptable to them. There are clients currently seeking services for assaults that occurred over a decade ago, but they were never able to process and heal until they were offered a non-verbal approach to treatment. This funding has allowed individuals who would not otherwise engage in mental health services to actively participate and begin to heal.

GRAND TRAVERSE BAND OF OTTAWA  
AND CHIPPEWA INDIANS



#### Tribal • Grantee Perspective

T-SASP funding has provided us with more resources that are not only culturally specific, but survivor-centered. T-SASP funding has also been instrumental in supporting our traditional ways of healing, and for the first time, every Avellaka Program was able to offer a healing gathering for our women to whom we provided services for sexual assault. The results are positive; the healing and support still continue through the program and from the sisterhood developed through this healing gathering.

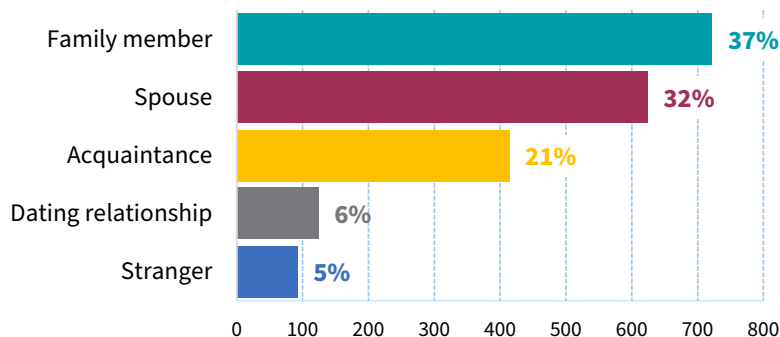
LA JOLLA BAND OF LUISENO INDIANS

## Victims' Relationships to Offenders

Grantees serve victims of sexual assault. Between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2019:

- The victims most frequently served or partially served were victimized by a **family or other household member** (37%).
- The remaining victims were most commonly victimized by a **spouse or intimate partner** (32%) or by an **acquaintance** (21%).

**Figure 1** | Type of victimization by relationship to offender: **Sexual assault** (6-month average)



## Reasons Victims Were Not Served or Were Partially Served

During each reporting period, grantees most frequently noted the following barriers as reasons why victims were not served or were only partially served:

- Victim did not meet statutory requirements;
- Services were inappropriate or inadequate for victims with substance abuse issues;
- Program unable to provide services due to limited resources.
- Conflict of interest;
- Services were not appropriate for victim;
- Hours of operation;
- Lack of child care; or
- Transportation.

## Demographics of Victims Served and Partially Served

Grantees served or partially served an average of **565** victims during each 6-month period. The victims most frequently served or partially served were **American Indian and Alaska Native** (86%), **female** (92%), and between the ages of **25 and 59** (45%).



**Tribal • Grantee Perspective**

As native people, families are taught to stick together and always support one another through good times and very hard times. Many of us have been raised in extended-family homes. Some households have 15 people from the same family under one roof, many include more than one generation living together. This is the native traditional way of living and has evolved for many reasons, but because of this extended family living, domestic abuse and sexual abuse are often not discussed out of shame, because it is a beloved family member, or because we have been taught that families stick together. Realizing that abuse is occurring in homes and families are refusing to break up, our program has developed a unique way of providing domestic violence and sexual assault education that includes the entire family. We have found that this approach to helping our families has worked very well in a community where extended family living is an important way of everyday life. By providing educational opportunities for multi-generational groups, we can hold perpetrators accountable and promote the safety of victims.

**LAC DU FLAMBEAU BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA**

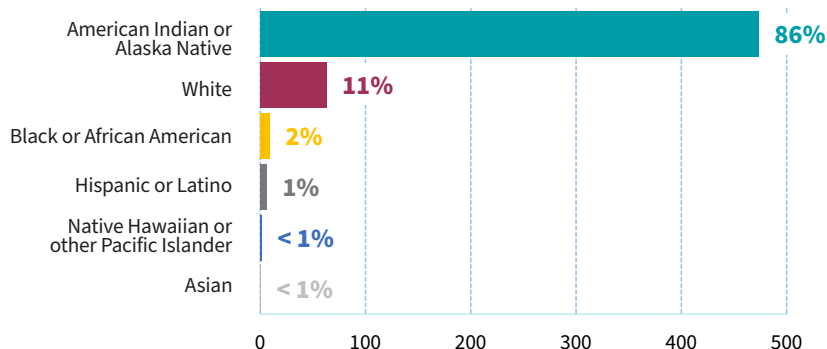


**Tribal • Grantee Perspective**

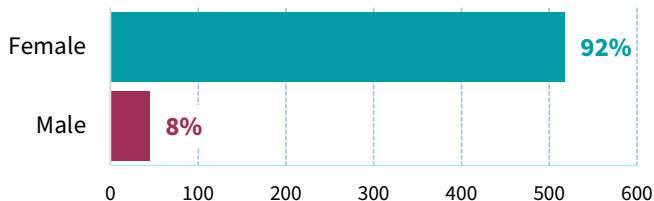
The T-SASP funding has allowed us to begin a Sexual Assault Services Program culturally specific to our Tribal population's need. As a result of our funding, the Director and our part-time advocate were able to attend the Women are Sacred Training Conference in Albuquerque. This gave us an opportunity to learn more regarding assisting Native American women who have been victimized by Sexual Assault/ Child Molestation, as well as giving us valuable information on Tribal Court Codes and historical trauma experienced by Native American Tribes. Due to the T-SASP funding, we have been able to provide a 24-hour hotline, an advocacy office, a sustainable Talking Circle Group, and a Cultural Healing event every quarter. We have been able to support victims through court advocacy, crisis intervention, forensic interviews, transportation, case management, referrals, and other needed support. Finally, we have been able to offer transitional housing, utility, and gas assistance.

**PONCA TRIBE OF INDIANS OF OKLAHOMA**

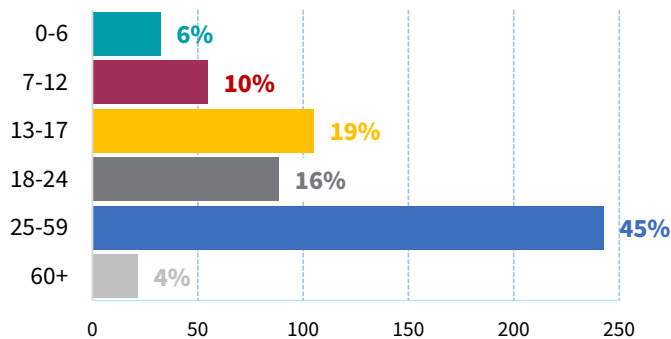
**Figure 2** | Demographics of victims served and partially served: **Race/ethnicity** (6-month average)



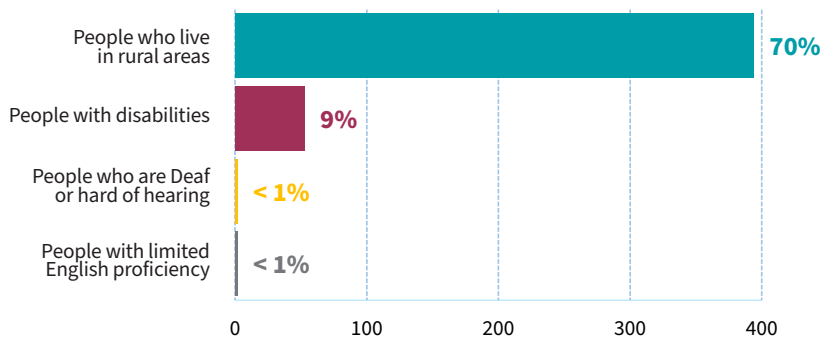
**Figure 3** | Demographics of victims served and partially served: **Gender** (6-month average)



**Figure 4** | Demographics of victims served and partially served: **Age** (6-month average)



**Figure 5** | Demographics of victims served and partially served: **Other** (6-month average)





### Tribal • Grantee Perspective

Our society as a whole puts undue pressure upon victims of sex crimes to prove that they have been sexually assaulted. Victim blaming is too often a social norm, and an unflattering and unjust stigma generally follows victims of sex crimes. In order to combat the stigma, programs that advocate on behalf of victims must create and continue to seek strong collaborations within other social service programs, law enforcement, and court systems.

Each of these entities has a vital role in the wellbeing and safety of a victim. Too often we see the burden of proof being placed upon the victim rather than where all blame belongs, on the perpetrator. If that burden of proof is unmet or the victim presents themselves in a less than satisfactory way we see less stringent sentencing if any sentence at all. Strong collaborations that are cognizant of not only the perpetrator's rights and due justice, but also the victim's rights, are a necessity in every community, both tribal and non-tribal. Holding perpetrators accountable at every step of the process is imperative.

SEMINOLE NATION OF OKLAHOMA



### SD • Grantee Perspective

It is safe to say that sexual violence remains a grossly underreported victimization in our area and that it is nearly a taboo item to discuss with some people and in some communities. Although significant progress has been made to lessen any stigma, it still remains somewhat of a taboo subject that is best "swept under the rug" rather than being openly discussed and service being provided to victims/survivors. Continued outreach into the outlying communities will help to lessen the burden of the victimization and in turn result in more victims seeking the assistance that they need.

SACRED HEART CENTER, SOUTH DAKOTA



### Tribal • Grantee Perspective

Our most significant area of need is lack of local resources like counseling, affordable housing, and public transportation. The counties we serve all have small communities that may have affordable housing, but lack basic things like grocery stores, let alone services needed to help aid healing. These victims often fall through the cracks. They do not seek services or have the ability to follow through as they do not have the transportation to get their needs met, like getting to the hospital to get a SANE exam or getting to the Courthouse for various court dates.

IOWA TRIBE OF OKLAHOMA

## Secondary Victims

Secondary victims are individuals who are indirectly affected by sexual assault, including children, siblings, spouses or intimate partners, parents, grandparents, other relatives, friends, and neighbors.

- Grantees provided services to an average of **288** secondary victims during each 6-month period.

## Remaining Areas of Need

Grantees most frequently cited a **need for more community education and outreach** in order to:

- Combat stigma associated with sexual violence;
- Encourage reporting of sexual assault;
- Increase awareness of available sexual assault services;
- Teach youth and adults about consent, healthy relationships, and how to respond to incidents of sexual assault; and
- Strengthen efforts toward increasing offender accountability.

Many grantees also reported difficulty serving victims due to **fear and stigma surrounding the reporting of domestic violence and sexual assault in their communities.**

Grantees stressed the importance of **holding offenders accountable**, through:

- Updating tribal legal codes;
- Increased law enforcement presence on reservations;
- More arrests and prosecutions; and
- Stronger sentencing.

Grantees also cited a need for more **ongoing support for victims**, including:

- Mental health and substance abuse counseling;
- Emergency shelter and long-term housing;
- Transportation;
- SANE services; and
- Child care.