

Walking Together: State–Tribal Partnerships in Youth Suicide Prevention Lessons from ND THRIVES

Relationships, Roles, and Shared Responsibility

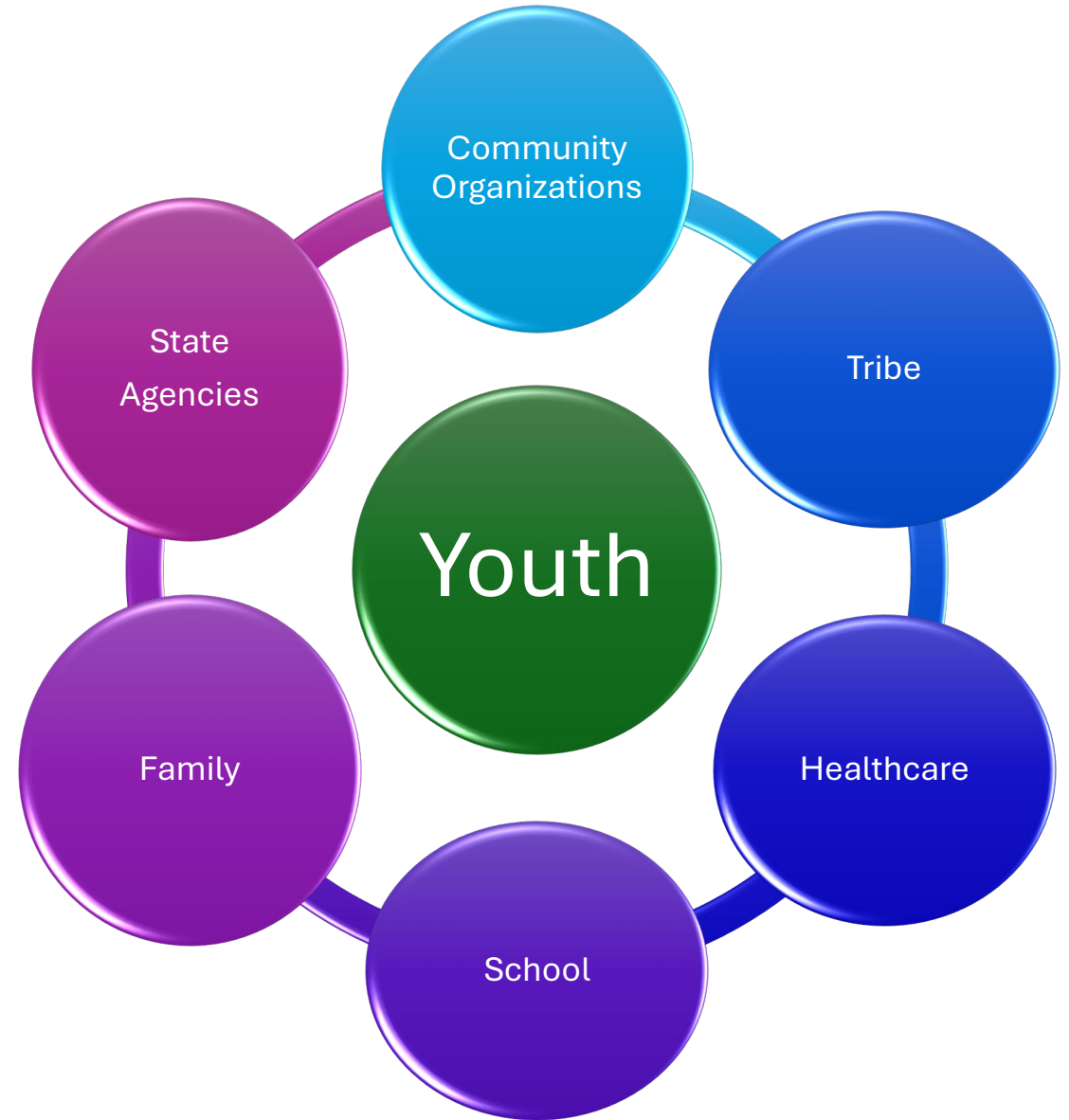
Dr. Rachel Navarro and Dr. LaVonne Fox
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How many of the youth you serve move between multiple systems, communities, or jurisdictions?

Tribal health	Indian Health Service	Public schools	BIE schools
County services	State behavioral health	Hospitals	Juvenile justice

Why This Matters

- The Systems Are Separate.
- The Youth Are Not.



Sovereignty Matters

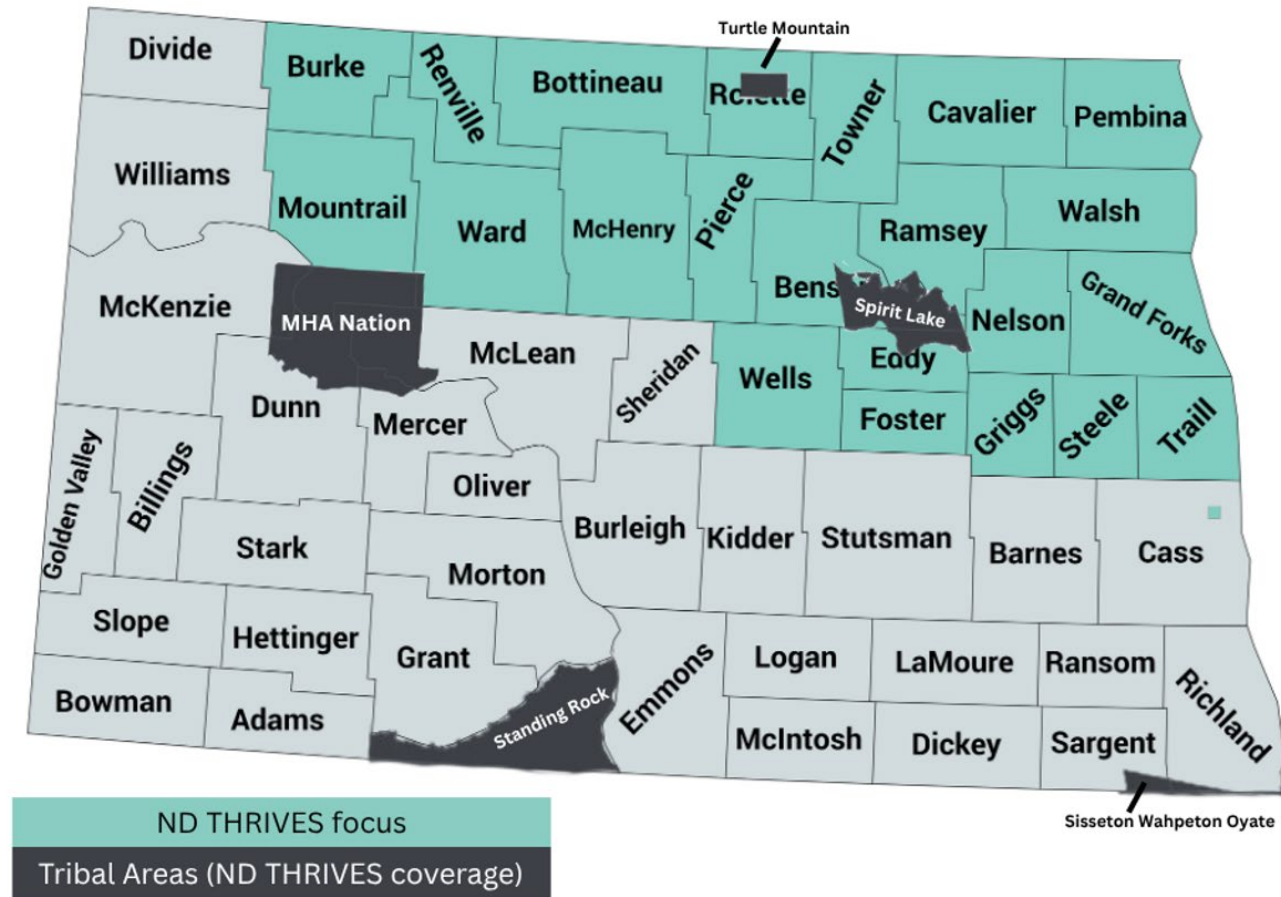
- Different authorities.
- Different responsibilities.
- Different decision-making structures.
- Different histories and experiences
- Different community priorities

***Respecting sovereignty is not a barrier to collaboration.
It is the foundation of collaboration.***

ND THRIVES Context

- Rural/frontier
- North Dakota Tribal and non-tribal communities
- Youth ages 10–24 Multiple systems
- Prevention focus

These lessons reflect one state's experience. Your communities, partnerships, and structures may look different. We share these lessons in the spirit of learning together.



What We Thought Partnership Would Look Like

- Shared goals
- Coordinated services
- Strong communication
- Easy collaboration

Then:

- The reality was more complicated.

Five Realities of State–Tribal Partnership

- Systems move at different speeds.
- Roles must be negotiated.
- Trust must be earned.
- Partnerships evolve.
- The work is never finished.

Reality #1: Systems Move at Different Speeds

- School calendars
- Tribal processes
- Grant timelines
- Healthcare demands
- Leadership changes

Slow does not mean resistance.

What We Learned

- Allow more time.
- Build flexibility.
- Respect processes.
- Understand competing demands.

ND THRIVES examples:

- School implementation timelines.
- Community engagement.
- Advisory development.

Reality #2: Roles Must Be Negotiated

Questions:

- Who leads?
- Who decides?
- Who communicates?
- Who follows up?
- Who owns the work?

Clarity Creates Trust

When roles are unclear:	When roles are clear:	ND THRIVES Examples:
Frustration	Confidence	Hopeful Connections
Duplication	Accountability	Warm handoffs
Missed expectations	Sustainability	Healthcare partnerships

Reality #3: Trust Must Be Earned

Trust is built through:

- Showing up.
- Listening.
- Returning.
- Following through.
- Admitting mistakes.

Hopeful Connections: A Partnership Lesson

- **Community members:**

"We want to help."

- **Healthcare:**

"We cannot assume responsibility for every concern."

- **Schools:**

"What happens if a student tells me something?"

- **ND THRIVES:**

"We need a pathway, not another program"

The solution was not assigning responsibility to one system.

It was helping systems understand how to support one another.

People Trust People

People rarely trust programs. They trust people.

Examples:

- Repeated school engagement.
- Advisory boards.
- Learning communities.
- Community meetings.

Reality #4: Partnerships Evolve

Year 1:

- Learning.

Year 2:

- Clarifying.

Year 3:

- Coordinating.

Year 4:

- Shared leadership.

How Our Thinking Changed

What We Thought

- Information creates change.
- Shared goals create alignment.
- Training leads to implementation.
- Programs drive outcomes.

What We Know

- Relationships sustain change.
- Roles require discussion.
- People implement programs.
- Communities lead.

Reality #5: Partnership Is Never Finished

- Staff turnover.
- Leadership changes.
- Funding cycles.
- Community needs.
- New opportunities.

Partnership is a practice, not a destination.

ND THRIVES Examples

Healthcare partnerships

- SBIRT-SC, Referral pathways.

School partnerships

- STARS, QPR, gatekeeper training.

Learning Networks

- Thriving Together Series, cross system learning

Community

- Hopeful Connections
- Advisory structures

Emerging Partnerships

- Applying lessons to new collaborations (Bottineau)

Lessons Learned: Things We Got Wrong

- We sometimes moved faster than trust.
- We assumed others shared understanding.
- Our to-do list was larger than our relationship foundation
- We focused on activities before building relationships

What Partnership Is & Is Not

Is

- Shared goals
- Distinct responsibilities
- Mutual respect
- Coordinated support
- Community ownership
- Better outcomes for youth

Is Not

- Not assimilation
- Not one system directing another
- Not simply obtaining tribal approval
- Not inviting tribal partners after decisions are made
- Not expecting one organization to represent all Indigenous communities

What Strengthened Collaboration

- Relationships before activities
- Practice humility
- Transparency
- Flexibility
- Shared purpose
- Respect for sovereignty
- Shared decision-making
- Start small.
- Clarify roles.
- Share decision-making.
- Build around youth needs.
- Expect the work to take time.

Lessons to Share

- Spend more time building relationships.
- Clarify roles earlier.
- Discuss sustainability sooner.
- Develop shared language.
- Address decision-making explicitly.
- Accept that trust takes time.

Interaction

Think about one state or tribal partner you wish you worked more closely with.

- What makes collaboration difficult?
- What has helped build trust?
- What is one next step?

Final Reflection

Youth do not experience our organizational charts funding streams, or jurisdictional boundaries

- They experience relationships
- They experience connection.
- They experience belonging
- And they experience whether the adults in their lives work together.

Walking Together

- The goal is not for States and Tribal Nations to become the same.
- The goal is to walk alongside one another while honoring different histories, responsibilities, strengths, and ways of leading.



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