

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

BY

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BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF AMERICA

May 26,1999

Introduction

Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today about juvenile crime in Indian Country and the value of Boys & Girls Clubs of America (B&GCA) in addressing juvenile crime and the developmental needs of Native youth. I speak to you as the Chairman of B&GCA's Native American National Advisory Committee. The purpose of this committee is to provide leadership, insight on Native American values and culture, and guidance as B&GCA expands its services to Clubs serving Indian Country. We want to assure the greatest possible benefit for Native American and Alaska Native youth and their families.

Indian Tribes have displayed incredible resilience whenever their right to self-determination and self-governance is threatened by external actions taken or proposed by federal and state governments or as a result of court decisions. Internal threats to tribal sovereignty, however, are matters not widely discussed or even acknowledged. Left unchecked, these internal threats, such as those posed by juvenile delinquency, can slowly erode a tribe's right of self-determination and self-governance.

The purpose of this testimony is to examine the potential threat that juvenile delinquency has on tribal sovereignty, and to examine how some tribes are acting to address this growing problem in a positive way by starting Boys & Girls Clubs.

Juvenile Delinquency

Last year the United States Senate Committees on Indian Affairs and Judiciary held a joint hearing concerning gang activity within Indian Country. Mr. Kevin V. Di Gregory, Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division, testified that "...law enforcement reports and anecdotal information do suggest several trends in youth violence and criminal activity in Indian Country:

- 1) juveniles account for an increasing percentage of all serious crimes committed in Indian Country;
- 2) juveniles are offending at younger ages;
- 3) gang members in Indian Country frequently commit violent offenses and engage in crimes for profit;
- 4) gang members will not hesitate to confront and attack law enforcement officers (citation omitted)."

Di Gregory went on to state that "A 1994 Bureau of Indian Affairs Division of Law Enforcement survey identified more than 181 active gangs on or near Indian Country. A follow-up study in 1997, with 132 participating tribes, estimates 375 gangs with approximately 4,650 gang members on or near Indian Country.

It was hardly surprising that the Executive Committee for Indian Country Law Enforcement Improvements began its report by stating that, "There is a public safety crisis in Indian Country." The report examines the current state of law enforcement in Indian Country and the options for improving public safety and criminal justice in Indian Country. The report recommends that (1) a substantial

infusion of resources into Indian Country law enforcement is essential, and (2) the delivery of law enforcement services must be consolidated and improved. The appendix to the report highlights specific criminal justice problems in Indian Country, such as: juvenile delinquency and gang activity, sexual and physical abuse of children, and substance abuse in Indian Country.

While the report brings long overdue attention to the public safety and criminal justice problems in Indian Country, its value is diminished by the fact that no attention was given to the role that positive youth programs can play in preventing high-risk behavior.

More jails, more officers, and more coordination among federal and tribal law enforcement are sorely needed. But focusing solely on how additional resources can be used to "create an effective police presence, to investigate major crimes in Indian Country, and to augment law enforcement management, administration, and oversight functions" is a one-sided approach to the public safety crisis in Indian Country. Rather than spending all of our time and resources getting prepared for what we expect to be the next crop of troubled youth, our generation should also be investigating ways in which we can build strong, sustainable, and vigorous programs that will improve their lives.

Boys & Girls Clubs in Indian Country

Thousands of young people in Indian Country now have a positive, healthy place to go for recreation, thanks to perseverance and dedication of parents, tribal governments, and other concerned adults to start Boys & Girls Clubs on or near Indian lands. The youth being served by these Clubs are growing in personal skills and leadership, and are increasing in knowledge and pride about their cultural heritage and traditions. On one reservation, local law enforcement, accustomed to arresting a new crop of 12-year-olds for alcohol use on a regular basis, reports that arrests have declined considerably since the Boys & Girls Club. opened.

This exciting new initiative in Indian Country grows out of a 12-year successful team effort by the

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HLJD) and Boys & Girls Clubs of America (B&GCA). In 1987, HUD's Office of Public and Indian Housing launched an initiative with B&GCA to establish Boys & Girls Clubs in public housing communities across the country. It was hoped that these Clubs would benefit youth residing in public housing, who are particularly at risk for alcohol and other drug use, health problems, pregnancy, crime, violence, delinquency, and failure in school. The Clubs did indeed help these disadvantaged young people. A 3-year independent evaluation study by Columbia University confirmed that clubs in public housing significantly reduce juvenile crime and drug activity, while improving the quality of life for children and their families.

Responding to similar problems among Native American youth, HLJD's Office of Native American Programs (ONAP) initiated an aggressive plan to help Indian housing authorities and tribes explore the feasibility of starting Boys & Girls Clubs. With support and technical assistance from ONAP and B&GCA, Native American communities are building youth programs that are improving the lives of their children (See attached map of existing Boys & Girls Clubs in Indian Country).

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is now hoping to start an initiative to support Boys & Girls Clubs in Indian Country. The idea of a partnership between Boys & Girls Clubs of America and BIA came out of discussions between Kevin Gover, Assistant Secretary -Indian Affairs, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and B&GCA staff at last year's B&GCA Congressional Breakfast. BIA is proposing, in partnership with B&GCA, a program of training, technical assistance, and direct financial support to start Boys & Girls Clubs onsite at BIA schools. Over a two-year period, BIA is seeking \$3 million to provide such assistance to 10 pilot schools, with the ultimate goal of establishing 30 Clubs. It is my hope that this committee will support BIA's request to serve the next generation of Native youth.

Forging a New Path

Here are the stories of six Indian clubs that have successfully faced the challenge. Working with tribal and private sector partners in their communities, these clubs are the leaders in providing positive alternatives and better futures for Indian and Alaska Native youth.

Tyonek Unit of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Anchorage

Tyonek, AK

Tyonek, which means "little chief," is a rural village of 13.0-150 Athabascan Indians. Village residents call themselves Tebughna, which means "beach people." Tyonek, about 40 miles from Anchorage on the shores of Cook Inlet, is accessible only by airplane and barge.

The Tyonek Boys & Girls Club began in 1993, thanks to the efforts of concerned parents who were looking for a safe, fun place for their children. An initial group of six volunteers really helped make the Club happen. The volunteers worked originally to start the Club under the umbrella of the Kenai Boys & Girls Club. The Club also worked with the Cook Inlet Housing Authority to apply for a HLJD Public and Indian Housing Drug Elimination Grant. The two have developed a positive working relationship, and the housing authority has generously agreed to provide annual financial support for the Club with funds from its NAHASDA block grant.

In 1995, a VISTA volunteer came to Tyonek and helped the fledgling Club establish a more formal relationship with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Anchorage, with whom Tyonek is still affiliated. Representatives from the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Anchorage have made a concerted effort to listen to the Tyonek community and respect their opinions about the services needed. The VISTA volunteer, Lisa Stevenson, eventually became the Club's Branch Manager. As an outsider, she had to gain the trust of community residents. The difference came, she says, as "the tribe saw the change in the kids. Parents say the attitudes of their children are more positive.

They see the success and then they are drawn to the program. The Club is geared toward what the community wanted."

The Club has made a difference in the community. According to Emil McCord, the Club's first Unit Director, "There was a feeling of hope when the Club opened. The kids had something that really belonged to them." Club members contribute to the community in many ways. Club members volunteer as reading and math tutors at the school, help run a fund-raising carnival for the church, assist elders in the village, and plan and operate the youth subsistence camp when Tyonek is the host. Two teen aides work part-time in the Club teaching arts and crafts, playing with the younger children, and helping clean up. For one of the aides, her work helped her realize how her efforts made her a role model to her younger sister and other young Club members.

In addition to sports and Boys & Girls Clubs of America youth development programs, the Club supports a number of cultural programs, such as Native Youth Olympics training, beading, a talking circle, and a drum group. Club members built their drum themselves from a cottonwood tree, and now perform proudly for Tyonek visitors and in other villages. An annual highlight for Club members is the traditional fishing subsistence camp with other area villages. Youth learn the salmon fishing techniques of their ancestors and dry the fish for distribution to the elders in the camp's host village.

The Club started in a 1,200-square foot building owned by the village. The local school allows the Club to use its gym and outdoor fields. This building has served the Club well to start-up, but is now crowded with donated equipment and its many members. Every youth in the village is a Club member.

To help provide more space, the Tyonek Traditional Council donated a bigger building for the Club a few years ago. While it had no funds budgeted for renovation, the Club is renovating the

building with donations of supplies and labor from village residents. In addition, a group of missionaries from Mississippi has traveled to Tyonek for the past two summers to complete critical tasks such as reinforcing the ceiling and installing new floors. The Club moved into its new home in Spring 1999.

The Tyonek Boys & Girls Club has been so well-received at meeting the unique needs of rural Alaska, that it is now serving as a model for a statewide expansion effort across Alaska. The Club described below is an example of that expansion.

Katmai Unit of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Anchorage

Naknek, AK

The doors of the Katmai Boys & Girls Club first opened in April 1998 in the Naknek Civic Center building, which is operated by the Naknek Village Council. The Club, a unit of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Anchorage, serves three communities in the area with a combined population of more than 1,000 people. Naknek, the original Club location, is separated from South Naknek by the mile-wide Naknek River, and from King Salmon by 5 miles of road. More than 45,000 visitors pass through King Salmon each year on their way to the Katmai National Monument, for which the Boys & Girls Club is named.

The Club's home is the Naknek Civic Center, a building with 1100 square feet of space that is shared between the Club, bingo, the tribal health service, and other community functions. The building includes a full-size gym, racquetball court, bowling alley, and snack bar. Among the Club's 180 members, the most successful programs are summer softball, the Ultimate Journey, summer day camp, basketball camp, and swimming. "The kids are having fun and they're safe", says one teenage

Club member from Naknek. "hanging out and playing ball is more fun than getting in trouble."

Many organizations in the community provide valuable support to the Boys & Club. The Sockeye Swim League developed a program to promote recreational swimming, water safety, and competitive swimming for Club members. A representative from the Bristol Bay Borough Police teaches a popular crafts class once week. The Alaska Department of Social Services provides anti-drug and alcohol programs. Other supporters include the Bristol Bay Borough School District, Carnai Health Clinic, the local Suicide Prevention Program, the Bristol Bay Borough government, and local churches.

As the Club has emerged, donations from local airlines have been very helpful in transporting youth between the communities. However, transportation of South Naknek youth across the river to the Club in Naknek remains a challenge. Other challenges include filling vacant jobs at the Club, publicizing Club events (the three communities lack a local newspaper), and sharing space at the Civic Center. The Club's biggest strength is parent support and volunteer participation. "Your Club will be successful if you have adults there that care, even if you don't have a great deal of money," says April Pruitt, Unit Director.

The Katmai Boys & Girls Club is just the beginning of a strategy to serve the youth of Naknek, South Naknek, and King Salmon. Katmai plans to open a sub-unit in King Salmon in Spring 1999 at the World War H-era King Salmon Air Force Base, which was closed in 1993. In South Naknek, an old elementary school is being remodeled so that Club extension services can be provided there.

Boys & Girls Club of Chelsea

Chelsea, OK

Like many small rural towns, Chelsea, Oklahoma has not historically had much to offer its energetic youth outside of school. A 1993 survey found that community youth had few structured or recreational activities, the lack of which had contributed to a rise in substance abuse and delinquent behavior.

With help from the Housing Authority of the Delaware Tribe of Indians, housing residents, B&GCA field staff, and concerned Chelsea citizens, and aided by a HLTD Youth Sports Program grant, the Club received its official charter in July 1994.

The Club has since become a welcome haven for local youth, serving more than 400 members. Approximately 85 percent of Club members are Native American. Because the Club is not located on a reservation, the Chelsea Boys & Girls Club is unusually diverse. Members come from a variety of family backgrounds, including single parent, stepparent, foster parent, and two-parent homes. Community members believe that the Club's encouragement of diversity is a very welcome quality. At the Club, "Kids are developing a new attitude," says Randy Keller, executive director.

The people of Chelsea and the housing authority have consistently demonstrated their commitment and support for the Club. This cooperative spirit helped make possible the grand opening of the Club's new 10,000-square-foot facility in November 1996. The facility is named in honor of the former Chief of the Delaware Tribe, the late Lewis B. Ketcham.

The Club weaves ceremonial activities and traditional cultural enrichment into its programming, which features a variety of athletic and social programs, including:

- **P.L.A.Y. Daily Challenges.** A Club member won a trip to the Olympic Summer Games in Atlanta through the Jackie Joyner-Kersey World Class Challenge.
- **The Ultimate Journey,** an environmental education program.

- **SMART Moves**, a substance abuse prevention program.
- **Youth of the Year**. Chelsea was chosen to host the 1996 State competition for the Oklahoma Area Council of Boys & Girls Clubs.
- **Coffee Talk**, a weekly roundtable for female youth
- **Boys to Men**, a parallel discussion group for male youth, and
- **A Whole New World**, a program for teenage girls, recently won a national Honor Award for Program Excellence in the Southwest Region.

The Club also has gained recognition from B&GCA as an Outreach Partner by increasing its membership by more than 10 percent each year.

The Chelsea Club thrives on its innovation and energy. "Its success is due to our extensive community involvement," says Keller. The Club has formed strong working partnerships with the Delaware Housing Authority, the Northeast Oklahoma Rural Electric Cooperative, and the Chelsea Volunteer Fire Fighters, among others. "Build it and they will come," has become the rallying cry for Club supporters.

Gila River and Sacaton Branches of the Boys & Girls Club of the East Valley

Komatke and Sacaton, AZ

The Boys & Girls Club of the East Valley, Gila River Branch, is located in the Gila River Indian Community 30 miles southwest of Phoenix. The Gila River Indian Community, population 9,500, is home to the Pima (Akimel O'odam) and Maricopa (Pee Posh) Tribes. The Pima Maricopa is the third largest tribe in Axizona.

The Gila River Branch in Komatke are under the umbrella of the Boys & Girls Club of the East Valley. The first Gila River Branch Club is housed in a previously vacant building that was part of a former Catholic missionary school built in 1899. The building is leased to the tribe by the local Catholic diocese. In January 1996, Intel Corporation sent work crews of volunteers to assist with building renovations.

The Club opened in July 1996 and serves more than 360 members. The revitalization of the school as a Club facility has "breathed life back into the Gila River community," according to the Gila River Indian Community Governor, Mary V. Thomas. The Club is viewed by the community as a stepping stone toward improving the lives of its young people.

The Club is proud of its game room, a food service area that can also be used as a concession stand during sporting events, a gym, meeting rooms, and a computer and educational center. The Club recently opened a teen center that provides youth ages 13 and up with their own room for activities.

"The youth are what make the Club special. The youth are the future leaders for Gila River," says Chilo Figueroa, Gila River branch chief

The youth of the Gila River Indian Community got their second Boys & Girls Club on September 15, 1997. The new Sacaton Branch of the Boys & Girls Club of the East Valley had a fantastic first year with over 400 members. The Sacaton Branch serves youth on the east side of the reservation, while the original branch in Komatke serves youth on the west side.

Boys & Girls Club of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe

Fort Washakie, Wyoming

The Boys & Girls Club of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe, located in the town of Fort Washakie. The Club opened its doors in May 1997 to fill a void in positive activities for community youth. The Club currently serves 280 youth, most of whom are Native Americans. The Wind River Reservation, home to the Eastern Shoshone and also the Northern Arapaho Tribe, is a place of diverse geography. In the east there are high sage prairies and near-desert conditions. In the west are the Rocky Mountains.

Sports are very popular at the Club. The Club sponsors several sports teams, such as basketball, softball, and soccer. The NIKE Leadership and Swoosh Clubs are very popular. In 1997, the Club received a B&GCA Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) grant to purchase equipment and uniforms for a baseball program. For over 20 years, there had been no baseball program on the reservation. For many kids, this was their first opportunity to learn the game. "A lot of the kids are surprised at what they've accomplished through the program," says Executive Director Ted Thayer. Seven teams in the area traveled all over Wyoming to compete.

Members also enjoy academic and leadership programs, such as Power Hour!, the Torch Club, and Youth of the Year. For members ages 14 to 17, the Club provides the Job Awareness Program, which helps the youth investigate various career paths. Another Club program is the Mock Trial, where youth visit the tribal courthouse to take part in a make-believe juvenile crime trial. Court staff volunteer their time to create cases to try in the mock court. They also teach Club kids how to act as judge, jury members, lawyers, and witnesses.

Keeping culture alive is important at the Club. The Club has a strong arts and crafts program, with a focus on pottery making. Several Club youth raised the money in 1997 to build their own drum. For the past two Halloweens, Club teens have hosted a haunted house and Halloween Carnival with community agencies to raise funds. The Club has also held yard sales, car

washes, and dinners. The Club now supports a drum group and a dance group with some of the proceeds.

Club members enjoy field trips to a bowling alley and swimming pool off the reservation. "We try to give them exposure to other places, to see the world outside the reservation," says Thayer. To get around, the Club is fortunate to have a 63-passenger bus donated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and a 12-passenger bus given by the tribal council.

Club members and staff are excited about their first 2 years, and are looking forward to the many possibilities ahead for fun, friendship, and growth.

Lapwai Unit of the Valley Boys & Girls Club, Inc.

Lapwai, Idaho

The first Boys & Girls Club in Idaho's Indian Country opened its doors on June 22, 1998 with great success! Forty youth showed up that first morning at the Lapwai Unit of the Valley Boys and Girls Club on the Nez Perce Reservation. By afternoon, there were 80 kids; 2 days later, 170. The Club now has a membership of 224.

The Nez Perce Reservation in north central Idaho is home to 1,800 enrolled tribal members and 17,867 non-members. Steep-sided canyons, mountains, and prairie lands on top of plateaus make up the landscape. Before the Boys & Girls Club was started, the reservation lacked enough youth activities.

Club members meet in a Church of God building in downtown Lapwai. The Club has an arts and crafts room, gym, computer lab, games area, and office. Kids who used to be bored living in a small town now have many activities to choose from at the Boys & Girls Club. The Club is

starting a Torch Club and Power Hour! time with tutors from Lewis and Clark State College. Other special activities have been trips to go rollerskating, swimming, and to play laser tag.

Summer at this brand new Club was a wet one. Over 200 kids from the Valley Boys & Girls Club swam and splashed at the Wild Waters Park in Couer D'Alene. The Lapwai Unit held an "H2O" day in a local park that included trips down the slip-n-slide, squirt gun fights, and a dunking booth.

Unit Director Josh Eckert is planning a retreat and campouts for this fall. Other plans include Nez Perce language classes, drug/alcohol education activities, sports tournaments, storytelling by tribal elders, and a special Teen Center at the Club.

One of the Club's first fundraisers was the "Run with the Wolves" in August, a 5-K run co-sponsored with the Nez Perce Wolf Education and Research Center. 1962 Olympic gold medalist Billy Mills helped draw a good crowd to the run. The runners were very excited to meet him, and to run through the natural wolf habitat. The Club will try to work with the Center more in the future, which works to keep grey wolves from becoming extinct. The new Club has received a lot of support from its parent Club in Lewiston, the Nez Perce Tribe, the housing authority, and other local groups. The Valley Boys & Girls Club put a new roof on the Church of God building where the Club meets. The tribe pays for janitorial services at the Club and the lease of a 15-passenger van from a local Ford dealership. The Nez Perce Tribal Housing Authority is supporting the Club with financial help from a HUD grant. With support like that from the community, the Lapwai Unit is off to a strong start.

Future Clubs

Since ONAP forged a partnership with B&GCA approximately 3 years ago, the number of Boys & Girls Clubs in Indian Country has increased from 12 to 46. Another 15 to 20 Native American communities are in the process of starting Clubs in States such as Minnesota, Nebraska, Alaska, Arizona, Oklahoma, and South Dakota. This strong growth was made possible in part by direct funding in grants to B&GCA from the 1999 Bureau of Justice Assistant's Violent Crime Reduction Trust Fund. With the support of Congress, the goal is to help start at least 1 00 Clubs in Indian Country by the year 2000.

To support the establishment of Clubs in Indian Country, ONAP has sponsored five regional implementation training workshops since 1996 for Tribally Designated Housing Entity (formerly Indian Housing Authority) and tribal government staffs. ONAP has also created a variety of products, such as a brochure, poster, video, and a "how to" implementation guide, which addresses important issues in starting and sustaining Boys & Girls Clubs in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

Conclusion

History has shown that short-term funding and verbal commitments for the development of youth programs, however well intentioned, lead to unsustained programs, false hopes and frustrations. In turn, Indian youth are left with no opportunity to express their hopes and dreams and no outlet to share their problems and frustrations. Such a vicious cycle holds potentially negative consequences for the future of tribal governments. Who will be the leaders of the future? Who will defend the right of tribal self-determination and self-governance before the congress, the federal agencies, and the states?

These questions concern the Honorable Ivan Makil, President of the Salt River Pima-

Maricopa Indian Community. At the Senate hearing on gang activity, Makil stated that: "Gangs in Indian Country present a very unique and difficult challenge. We have our own culture, customs, and traditions. The gang lifestyle of violence and disrespect for Community is not a true reflection of our People. *As we strive towards tribal governmental and individual economic self-sufficiency, we must also prepare ourselves to combat influences that are destructive to the very core of our stability and foundation.*" (Emphasis supplied.)

The familiar refrain from our leaders is that children are our most precious resource. Are they? Recall that the genesis of the Report of the Executive Committee for Indian Country Law Enforcement [Improvements was the 1993 tribal leaders meeting at the White House. Five years have passed. Indian youth who were then eight are now thirteen. Those who were fourteen are now nineteen. What have these young people been doing for the past five years? What positive influences and opportunities have they experienced, or is this simply the new crop of troubled youth?

By the end of 1999, nearly 20 additional Boys & Girls Clubs will have started in Indian Country. These Clubs have found that the Boys & Girls Club's mission, with its emphasis on self-esteem, belonging, and community involvement, fits well with Native American cultural values and contemporary needs.

The choice is simple. It's time to move from rhetoric to action. What will the youth from your tribe be doing in five years?