

STANDING ROCK SIOUX TRIBE

A Statement from Twila Rough Surface For The Senate Committee addressing Teen Suicide in Indian Country Washington DC June 15, 2005

Good Morning, I would like to thank Senator Dorgan for the invitation to state my concern for the young people of my tribe.

My name is Twila (Summers) Rough Surface, I am an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and lived on the reservation my entire life. I am a mother and a grandmother and come from a family of (5) brothers, (3) sisters with (14) nieces and (20)nephews.

I recently lost a niece to suicide on February 2, 2005. She was my sisters' third child. The following events, I believe contributed to the eventual death of my niece. January 07, 2005, her brother was killed in a car accident. During the grieving period, her mother had nobody to come and talk to her regarding the death of her son. I can only speculate that my niece saw all the hurt and couldn't handle the loss, so she decided to take her own life. My sister was overwhelmed by the deaths and also tried to take her own life. After the attempt my sister relayed the following "She thought the only way to make the hurt go away was to take her life so she would not feel the hurt and pain." Luckily a family member found her in time.

The loss of my nephew had a great impact on his friends. One of his friends who had been selected to be a pallbearer at his funeral committed suicide on the day my nephew was buried. His best friend also said he missed him very much and on April 7, 2005 he committed suicide

The effect of the deaths in my family has touched many and continues to be a concern. I must mention that at no point did any mental health professionals contact our family. I feel if there had been intervention with grief counseling and support for my sister and her children, my niece may have had a chance to grow to be an elder of the community.

The overall rate of suicide among our youth has increased. Rates remain unacceptably high. Adolescents and young adults often experience stress, confusion, and depression from situations occurring in their families, schools and communities. Such feelings can overwhelm young people and lead them to consider suicide as a "solution." Few schools and communities have suicide prevention plans that include screening, referral, and crisis intervention programs for youth. Programs designed to assist children and families dealing with sever trauma are not readily available on Standing Rock.

Families are economically disadvantaged and with the (40 to 75) mile trip to seek counseling it is virtually impossible to access these options. Transportation and access to a telephone is essential to regular therapy, however this is not a luxury the majority of our families have.

We do not have:

- Effective clinical care for the mental, physical, and substance abuse disorders.
- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions and support for help seeking
- Family and community support
- Support from ongoing medical and mental health care relationships
- Grievance counseling
- Not enough police

Suicide is preventable. Most suicidal individuals desperately want to live; they are just unable to see alternatives to their problems. Most suicidal individuals give definite warnings of their suicidal intentions, but others are either unaware of the significance of these warnings or do not know how to respond to them. Surviving family members, suffer the trauma of losing a loved one to suicide, and are at higher risk for suicide and emotional problems. We as a nation need to be aware.

- Learn the warning signs
- Get involved
- Become available
- Show interest and support
- Be willing to listen
- Be non-judgmental
- Offer empathy
- Offer hope that alternatives are available
- Out reach services

Take action, Remove means and get help from individuals or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for listening and request immediate assistance for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.