

# As Long as Wind Blows and Grass Grows

Building Relationships with  
Native American Tribes to Provide Services to  
Persons with Disabilities – The Wyoming Experience



PRESENTATION  
FOR

## NDRN 2017

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By Robert J. Walters, Staff Attorney

At the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) Conference, I was honored to give a presentation of Wyoming's experience in outreach to Native Americans on the Wind River Reservation. The title of the presentation (depicted above) embraced the catch words: "As long as Wind Blows and Grass Grows." You might recognize this phrase from the movie, "Little Big Man," starring Dustin Hoffman and Chief Dan George among others. It so happens that the phrase "as long as wind blows" comes from actual historic events. The point of the presentation was to highlight the importance of developing strong relationships with Native American tribes, which is a prerequisite to seeking to accomplish objectives to assist persons with disabilities.

The presentation focused upon "Doing Your Homework" beforehand to not only become more educated, but to dispel incorrect assumptions about the Tribes. The presentation included discussion about the history of the two Tribes in Wyoming – the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho – each of which has different cultural identities and traditions, which required recognition. The presentation also focused upon P&A's experiences, which has run the gamut of the programs it administers. One example has been in the Client Assistance Program to aid in the development of a substance abuse policy. Another involved assisting a patient at the Wyoming State Hospital who wanted a sweat lodge (see picture below) to practice his Tribal religion. In addition, regular visitation by a religious priest for ceremonies was facilitated via P&A assistance.

P&A also has been fortunate to have the involvement and participation of Tribal members on its Board and Council. This creates a two-way relationship that also creates benefits to assist P&A to seek to fulfill its objectives with each of the Tribes. These members provided important insight and understanding to the needs as well as familiarity with their respective populations.

The presentation concluded with suggestions, including the first objective to building trust, as well as being respectful; being patient; avoiding the inclination to be pushing agendas; being prepared to be turned away and asked to return at later times; and being open to opportunities. This is a common theme regardless of the entity seeking to reach out to Native American tribes. It has been fruitful in many ways and P&A has continued the opportunity to build the relationship.

Please contact me if you have need for more information!



## CHEYENNE HAS AN ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUND!!!

On June 10th, 2017, community leaders and officials from the City of Cheyenne dedicated the Friendship Playground at Cahill Park in Cheyenne. It is one of three similar playgrounds that seek to allow families of children with disabilities to be integrated with other children. The all inclusive park is changing the way normal and different are defined. The playground can be used by all ages and abilities, creating an environment where no one is left out. Community leaders say this play ground can provide a sense of belonging and foster friendships through positive play interaction.

The project was ten years in the making and a huge community effort for the capital city. Teresa Moore, Parks and Recreation Director, and Mayor Marion Orr provided introductory remarks before the ribbon cutting, emphasizing the role that many others in the community played and the generosity of donors. P&A salutes the City of Cheyenne for this accomplishment! P&A is thrilled for this opportunity for the children of Cheyenne!



MORE INFO

## CONTACT US

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