



National Center on Advancing
Person-Centered Practices and Systems

Culture & Person-Centered Practices

Héctor Manuel Ramírez – “Culture and Person-Centered Practices from a Native American/Alaska Native Perspective”

SPEAKERS

Héctor Manuel Ramírez

Hello, my name is Héctor Ramírez. My pronouns are they/them. I am Chiricahua Apache and Mexican and I live in the unceded territory lands of the San Gabrieleño Band of Mission Indians in what is called Los Angeles in the state of California. I am forty-seven years old and I'm a person with a disability. I have autism, I am hard of hearing and I have a mental health disability. I'm also a family member and a caretaker of people with disabilities.

One of the questions that I was asked is, “what do person centered thinking, planning and practice mean to you?” It just means nothing about me without me. And similarly for my family members that receive services, nothing about them without them. First of all, person-centered thinking, meaning that the approach that is done, it's really with the idea that it's driven by the beneficiary, by the person receiving services, the direct stakeholder. And that the planning, both in the initial stages, ongoing implementation and the evaluation processes that take place afterwards have that particular stakeholder leading as much as possible, if not really driving that particular effort.

We're all more than just our disability or just our need for services. We are very dynamic individuals like everybody else that really strive to advance a myriad of personal facets, whether it be our ethnicity, our spirituality, our religion, our sexual orientation as well as, you know, other aspects of our lives. Ability to really engage in the community of our choice, maintain those connections, particularly, when possible, as much to our culture and our language. And I say this as, you know, as a native person, as an indigenous person, to whom I am fortunate that my culture is a big part of who I am. It's part of the way my family interacts, but most importantly, the way in which my community functions. And it is one of the things that all of us work really hard to reclaim on a regular basis, having had both language and culture taken away from us and it's one of the things that we



personally hope to advance, not just as people with disabilities, but as a community in general.

And so, what I mean by culture, is not just necessarily focused on the language, reclaiming language, or the utilization of language. Some of the language that we sometimes will experience from service providers inadvertently, for the most part, that can be very stigmatizing or insensitive. But then also, I think when we talk about culture, we talk about things like dignity of risk and being able to engage in activities like every other member of our community. And being able to explore possibilities or scenarios that oftentimes other individuals, or that perhaps historically, we know might not be beneficial.

Similarly, I think culture from an intersectional framework, you know, really allowing individuals an opportunity to decide. And having the choice to be able to participate in parts of our community that are primarily driven by equity seeking populations, or individuals that have been struggling with marginalized issues, particularly when dealing with our LGBTQIA community, our indigenous communities, trying to thrive or survive. And oftentimes, there are a lot of elements that continue to really oppress those communities and the individuals, those of us that live there.

Person-centered planning in a culturally responsive way is really taking into consideration as much of the facets that really make up our unique identities because not only are we very biologically distinct beings, but the way that we experience life and that we celebrate or relate to our communities are also very unique. We might have both disability intersectionality, a regional identity as well. But you know, there's just so many different aspects that make up who we are that providing services to people really with a culturally responsive approach means that not only sometimes are we able to get services from people that not only look or are part of our community, but then also from individuals that have an understanding of those particular backgrounds that go beyond cultural competency so that it is more culturally responsive. That means that people continuously either know about our communities based on what we share and, you know, the interest that they take in really getting to know, you know, our backgrounds.

I remember, for example, having the availability of having somebody initially who was from the queer community, the LGBTQIA community be a service provider.



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And I think for me, personally, when I was getting those services, that allowed me an opportunity to really explore a lot of my choices, but also to really further validate and become more aware of my personal autonomy and choices. Actually, I know for a fact that I hadn't until that time really had an opportunity to explore the possibility that person-centered services could have this included. But it was something that I could ask for and that I was actually very glad that I was able to get. And other ways that, you know, the system can be more inclusive and culturally sensitive is, first and foremost, I think is uplifting people's dignities and choices and really having it be part of the design process, not just the time that there is direct services.

But also, in the way that the planning for these type of services are kind of developed at the state and federal level, making sure that these particular type of guidelines are included in there, that they're actually articulated so that when they are needed, we know that there's a reference to it. But that there can also be a certain degree of technical advice that is provided at the different levels of implementation all the way down to the direct services. Because we realize that one of the best ways sometimes that people are able to benefit from services is when they help to design them. And when those services really do help to meet the multiple facets of who we are, that in itself, it is something that is necessary.

Because I've noticed that there is not necessarily a similar type of follow through in the federal and state implementation. And oftentimes, at the local level, we end up having to really be explaining and asking for this type of practices. It's actually taxing. Because that's not necessarily why individuals seek services and having to get services to kind of explain or develop that, you know, on a personal level, oftentimes, it's also very taxing. And it's something we've minimized. Any one of us at any time in our lives has the potential to develop a disabling condition or permanent condition that might put us in a position where we might need these services.

And so, it behooves all of us to make sure that as these services are being developed, that they're not only responsive to the people that are currently getting services, and that we are learning from past mistakes, but that we also have a more forward type approach from a state and federal level. This is oftentimes the area where they're the ones that provide the direct technical service for some of these agencies that provides services, but more than anything else, they are the ones that oftentimes have to ensure that the services are delivered in particular



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way.

Because I don't necessarily know of a lot of people that say, "I want you to provide my services in the most bland, non-culturally specific, non-person-centered approach you can possibly give." If anything, I think we all pretty much oftentimes hear the opposite of that.

That goes to the other part, which is really to have a system in place in which both the beneficiaries or the people that are receiving the direct services are not able to only give feedback, but also to help drive the conversation and the policy discussions to ensure that as these programs are being developed, that as the standards are being created, as evaluation protocols are being set in place, and as funding priorities are being established, that it is being done even at the highest level in a person-centered way.

It just ends with what so many in the disability community have been saying, nothing about us without us at every level, particularly as we use my peers who are people with lived experience, but also people with lived expertise, that we are considered and recognized in those spaces where not only should we be at the table, but oftentimes also can be able to partner in developing all these different strategies.