

### Introduction

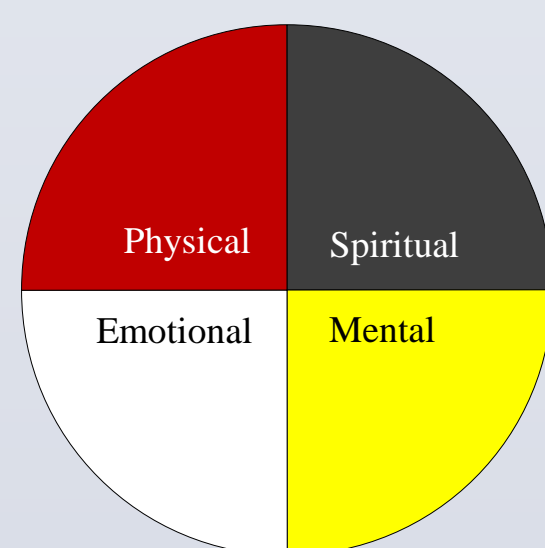
HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, and hepatitis affect American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities in disproportionate numbers. There is a high demand for culturally appropriate approaches to providing Native youth with information and skills to make healthy choices about sexual activity.

The Circle of Life (COL) was piloted in ten communities in 2006. In the pilots, the curriculum demonstrably raised students' understanding of HIV/AIDS and the necessary steps for avoiding risky behaviors and starting or maintaining healthy behaviors. The Circle of Life Curriculum Multimedia Project converts the original Circle of Life curriculum to an animated interactive online curriculum that will entertain students, require interaction, and teach them about important health topics.

### Objectives

The Circle of Life multimedia curriculum draws on American Indian/Alaska Native concepts of the medicine wheel.

Figure 1: Medicine Wheel Concept



The curriculum engages youth to make healthy decisions in order to prevent HIV/AIDS/STIs and viral Hepatitis.

Requirements of the program included:

- Integration of health with culture
- Emphasis on de-linking associations and stereotypes
- Strong messages about caring, empathy and respect
- Material and activities enhancing both knowledge and skills of youth, not just didactic content

Given this new media rich platform for teaching, the Circle of Life program is flexible and adaptable to different settings and uses repetition through animation to reinforce the content to help reinforce healthy behaviors and decision-making.

### Curriculum Components

The Circle of Life HIV/AIDS Prevention Curriculum offers enough flexibility to accommodate a range of school schedules and learning settings.

Features of the curriculum include:

- 7 chapter sessions of 20-35 minutes each
- A modular format that can be broken up or used in sequence
- DVD-ROM and online formats that allow use either in or outside the classroom
- Teacher-only content offering ideas and resources for reaching chapter learning objectives offline

In addition, the curriculum:

- Can be led by teachers, group leaders, other facilitators, and even students
- Can be tailored to various settings and mixed-gender groups

The curriculum follows three characters — Tasha, Ben, and the Turtle. They introduce each chapter and are also included in selected activities and stories. These characters are designed to appeal to AI/AN youth in middle school and junior high grade levels.

- Tasha is a young AI/AN girl.
- Ben is a young AI/AN boy.
- The Turtle is Tasha and Ben's teacher within the program. The turtle represents earth, protection, longevity, and a steady approach to life. It is one of the oldest, most sacred symbols in many Native American tribes.



Figure 2. Ben and Tasha characters used in the COL multimedia program

### Methods

There was a mixture of data collection processes and tools used at each of the various sites to demonstrate performance and outcomes measures across the project. Evaluation methods included surveys, interviews, observation and online metrics (completed and repeated program chapters).

### Pilot Results

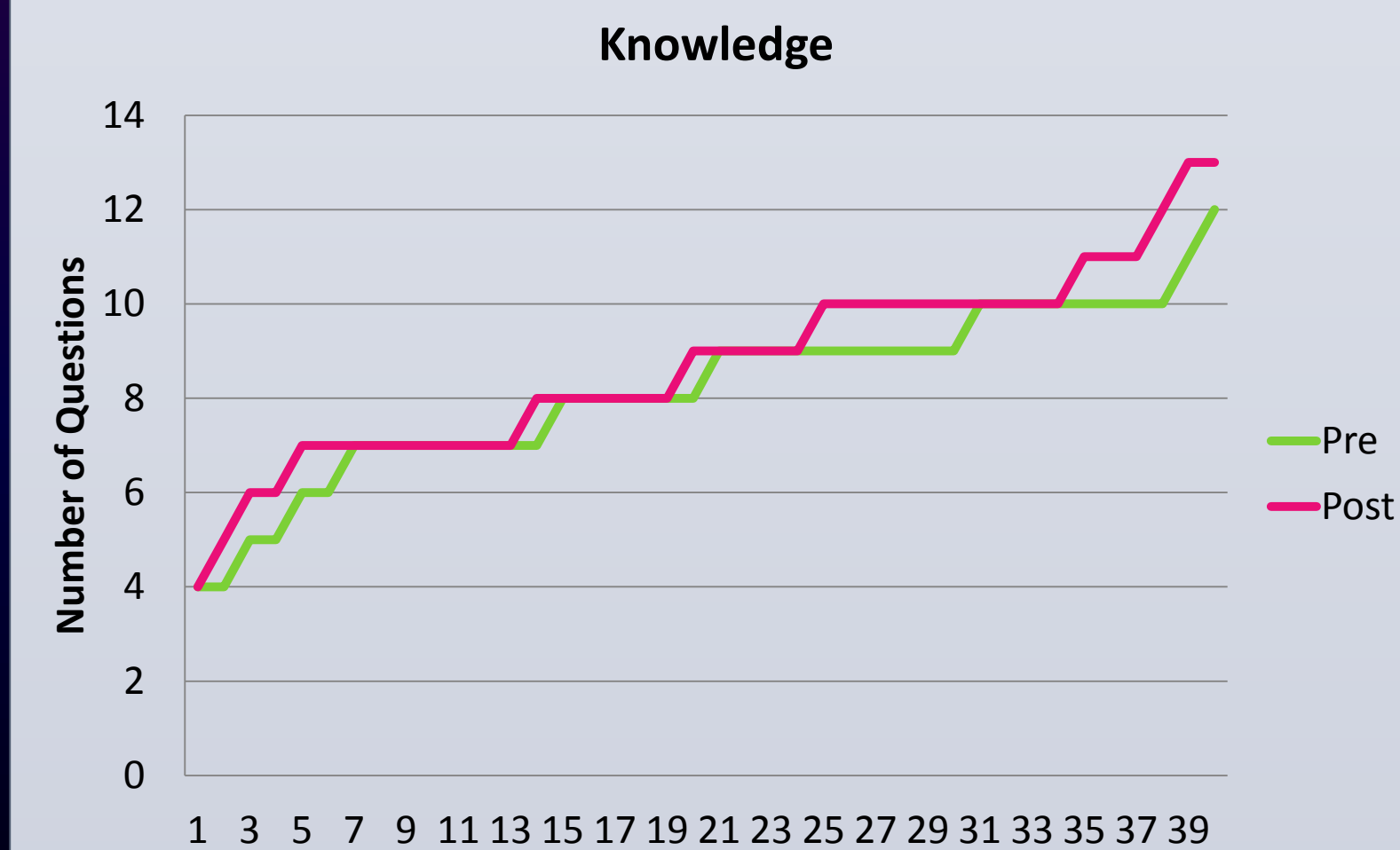
An initial pilot study that included two groups of boys and girls was initially conducted to determine if the curriculum would include knowledge change and behavior change. Additionally, we wanted to gauge if the program would be effective at teaching them the basics on the medicine wheel and other concepts within the curriculum.

Over the course of three months, 10 sites were conducted and each site held a 1-2 day pilot of the curriculum with at least 6-10 students, depending on location and time. Each pilot went through all 7 chapters of the program and each site had both boys and girls in almost equal numbers.

Thirteen true-false questions were pulled from the course to assess change in knowledge. These questions included these topic areas and sample questions:

1. **Making Healthy Choices : Do** Girls and boys go through puberty at the same age?
2. **Communicable Diseases: If** you have a communicable disease, you can give it to someone else
3. **Circle of Life: Is** making good decisions is important to your health
4. **HIV/AIDS and STIs: Can** you can get HIV from a toilet seat

The results of the questions showed an increase in all knowledge from the program components. The program clearly increased knowledge levels about HIV/AIDS, demonstrated understanding of healthy and risky behaviors and showed substantial reduction in fears about HIV.

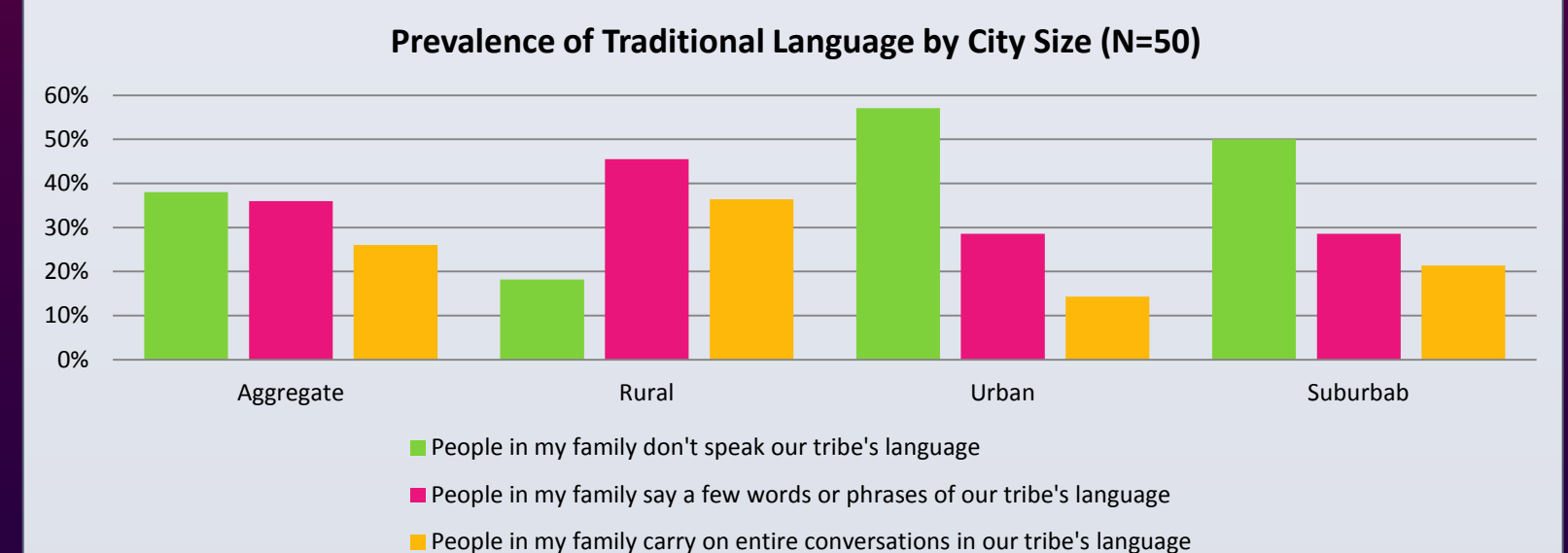


### Observations & Conclusions

In conclusion, the pilots have indicated that the multimedia platform was effective and easy to use. All participants had an increase in HIV knowledge and learned key concepts to preventing HIV/AIDS/STIs and viral Hepatitis.

It was observed that the students were engaged and enjoyed playing the program. They all liked different aspects of the program, and although some may not choose to “replay” game components, they quite enjoyed watching other students do the same activity, or even telling teacher's how to play the game.

We asked questions in regard to tribal languages and practices, to gauge acculturation in the students. Of the most prominent, prevalence by Tribal language by city size showed that students that come from urban areas as opposed to rural (non Tribal land) areas were the most assimilated to the dominant society.



### Acknowledgements

We'd specially like to thank all of the young participants and their parents for taking part in the pilot program. We are glad to have been part of your learning experience. Special thanks to the Indian Health Service's HIV Program, University of Denver's Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health, and to the online platform developers, KAT Communications.

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