

APACHE TRIBE OF OKLAHOMA



Apache Violence-Free Living Program Anadarko, Oklahoma

Founded:	1995
Service area:	a 7-county area in Oklahoma
Population:	total population 194,130; Native American 14,350
Source of funding:	federal, private donations, fundraisers
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Program Description

The Apache Violence-Free Living Program is a government agency of the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, and it provides services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking throughout a seven-county area in south central Oklahoma. Any victim—Indian or non-Indian—may seek confidential assistance from the program. In addition to victim advocacy and counseling, the program offers financial assistance, transportation to court and shelter, and referrals to various other community agencies. More recently, the program has developed a partnership with Oklahoma City University School of Law to provide free civil legal assistance to victims.

Though operating with a small staff of three, the Violence-Free Living Program provides a wide range of services for women and children who are escaping violent situations. With two law offices offering civil legal assistance, one in Anadarko and one in Oklahoma City, more victims have access to the services. The program has also developed a positive relationship with the local judiciary, leading to increased collaboration between the court system and victim advocates.

Jurisdictional Challenges

Because the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma does not currently operate its own tribal court, any criminal actions that occur in Indian Country are prosecuted in the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) court system. The staff at the Violence-Free Living Program have developed a strong relationship with the CFR prosecutor, and he sits on the Violence-Free Living Program Advisory Board. The Advisory Board meets monthly, and includes the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) chief of police and a criminal investigator.

Because of the unique "checkerboard" tribal jurisdiction in the Anadarko area, many of the crime victims who seek assistance from the program were actually victimized outside of Indian Country. The crimes that do not occur within Indian Country are heard in Oklahoma county courts. Due to the large service area, the staff at the center collaborate with multiple levels of partners and agencies.

Unique Partnerships

The collaboration between the tribe and the law school took several years to build, but both

partners report tremendous rewards from the partnership. The partnership with Oklahoma City University has resulted in additional assistance to victims—namely, legal representation in local state and CFR courts for women who have been battered and their children. The relationship is mutually beneficial. The Violence-Free Living Program is playing an active role in helping a new generation of attorneys develop sensitivity to victims' issues. All law students who represent Native American victims through this partnership receive several hours of training to teach them to understand the dynamics of violent victimization and the special issues facing victims of domestic violence. The staff at the Violence-Free Living Program assist in providing this training to law students, and they play an ongoing role in overseeing the cases in which law students have become involved.

The law students in the partnership with the Apache Tribe report a high satisfaction with the program. Not only do the law students receive hands-on training in representing Indian people in very important cases, but they also learn about the strengths of the tribal community and the individual victims they represent. Recently, a graduate of the law school applied for and received a job at the program to continue the work she started as a law student.

Developing New Services

The numbers of victims served by the Violence-Free Living Program have been steadily increasing over the past few years, including many referrals from the local vocational-technical school. The most accessed services are direct advocacy and financial assistance. Transportation and court accompaniment are also in high demand. With the increased number of referrals, the program has faced additional challenges to meet all victims' needs. At this time, free transportation is limited to trips to shelter, support groups or counseling, and court appearances due to high demand for help. However, if a victim does not feel comfortable meeting the advocate at the program's main offices in Anadarko, the advocate will meet the victim in an alternate location.

To supplement their grant funding, the Violence-Free Living Program has fundraising events that serve both to increase available resources and educate the community about victim issues and services. Staff members are cognizant of the need to develop sustainable programs and are developing creative ways to bring additional dollars to the program.

The next important goal for the program is to develop a tribally based shelter. Currently, the Apache Tribe transports victims who need a safe place to stay to shelters located at least 35 miles away. Many victims are unable to relocate, even temporarily, due to employment and/or school. A local tribal shelter would allow victims to maintain connections to the community and lessen the disruption in their lives. The staff envisions a "one-stop" center for victims of crime—a single location where victims could come to receive shelter, counseling, financial assistance, legal advice, and help with other needs all under one roof.

Keys to Success

- ◆ Work on cultivating relationships with all the criminal law jurisdictions in the service area. Include prosecutors and judges from neighboring jurisdictions on the advisory board.
- ◆ Develop relationships with local schools and agencies. Encourage them to refer victims of crime to the program.
- ◆ When partnering with a local college or university, ensure that all the key players are involved from the beginning. By including all relevant parties and authorities early, delays in implementation will be less likely.
- ◆ Collaborate with other programs. Combining services, such as victim advocacy and legal assistance, in the same facility makes it easier for victims to access resources.

Quotes

There are those families who actually make it. Once you go back and talk about all the work we've done,

*the things we've accomplished, it makes it worth it.
So many different lives have been touched.*

—Shelley Miller
Director
Apache Violence-Free Living Center

*The law students have been such a
nice mix. We've watched them grow as
they've struggled with all of these issues. Just
knowing that we're turning out 45 law students
a year with experience and knowledge about
domestic violence is a good feeling.*

—Kelly Gaines Stoner
Professor of Law
Oklahoma City University