

**Episode 70 - Dr. David Patterson, Silver Wolf (Adelv unegv Waya): Promoting Wellness and Challenging Cultural Narratives in Native American Communities**

[00:00:08] Welcome to living proof a podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at [www.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu). We're glad you could join us today. The series live in Provo examines social work research and practice that makes a difference in people's lives. I'm your host Adjoa Robinson and I'd like to take a moment to address you our regular listeners. We know you have enjoyed the living proof podcast as evidenced by the more than 130000 downloads today. Thanks to all of you we'd like to know what value you may have found in the podcast. We'd like to hear from all of you practitioners researchers students but especially our listeners who are social work educators. How are you using the podcasts in your classrooms. Just go to our Web site at [www.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu) forward slash podcast and click on the contact us tab. Again thanks for listening and we look forward to hearing from you. Happy spring from Buffalo where our famous Broadway market is bustling with seasonal activity and downtown baseball has returned. I'm Peter Sobota. In this episode we feature the work of our own Dr. David Patterson faculty member here at the School of Social Work and director of the Native American Center for Wellness Research. Dr. Patterson describes the core ideas that inform the creation of the center and its evolution goes on to discuss how the center's work promotes the educational experiences of Native American students and how the research generated there informs that physical emotional mental and spiritual wellness of Native Americans.

[00:02:05] Dr. Patterson also talks about how the center's activities are building programs that assist students to promote peace and social justice in the community. Along the way he touches on the impact of Indian boarding schools and challenges based on a host of historical trauma to Native American culture. Dr. Patterson concludes by discussing his own story and how his current work at the center reflects his debt to the support he has received. Dr. David Patterson is assistant professor at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work and director of the school's Native American Center for Wellness Research. He received his doctoral degree at the University of Louisville and in addition to Native Americans health and wellness. His research interests include alcohol and other drug treatment retention efficacy for special populations and barriers to best practices adoption and community based organizations. Dr. Patterson was interviewed by Dr. Adjoa Robinson assistant professor at the School of Social Work and the velvet voiced cohost of this podcast series. This is Adjoa Robinson host living free podcast series and my guest today is Dr David Patterson who is an assistant professor at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work and director of the Native American Center for Wellman's research. Thanks for joining us today David. Hey thanks for having me. So tell our listeners about this. I came to Buffalo in 2006. It took about a year. You know I had to teach class figured stuff out. And I knew I wanted to do something around starting some type of need of center if they didn't have to be research but had had to be something related to education Native education and all sorts of things.

[00:04:00] And so a year after I arrived in Buffalo these events started happening. Things started coming together and then it just started off with basically interest and give be given an office. But a sign on the door says OK here's the center. Basically just evolved out of just a desire to get something done. I never said your logo has three sisters on hat that represents sort of three focuses are foes. I am the center. Can you tell her unless there's a little bit about what the symbol means and what your three Phosa are. And so it's a long teaching I'll give sort of the brief topic on that so it's basically three sisters a corn beans and squash and the idea is that these three plants work together that they need one another to grow. And so what happens is that there is a meadow that's built and that the corn is playing it and it provides the stick for the beans and so the beans have a vine and they grow up and they have something to cling to the squash. They're more of a ground level plant

and they have big leaves on them so what they do is they have some protection for the mountain and they're kind of Thorning. So there are some wards of some predators or whatever. And all these things work together there. What happens is nutritious for how you use it go through it and then when all these things bear fruit and the season is over they go back into the ground and they nourish the ground so next year can be planned. So the idea is that you know with them separately they don't work very well.

[00:05:37] They work best when those things when those three sisters work together they rely on one another. And so the idea came out of that and it's an old teaching and the idea is that whatever we talk about health and wellness and all the sort of things you can't just separately talk about these independent issues without connecting everything Native folks have a deal that everything is connected. And the idea of you for instance you talk about alcohol and drugs. You can't talk about that without really talking about the family and the history and all these other things that could be intertwined with that. It's either helping it grow or helping it not grow. What are the three things that work together in your center. After thinking about it in some work in talking to the council or you know the senator has a board and we sort of came up with three things One is basically we titled everything everything's everything's on web to look at what is keeping the promise. You know there's an idea of is that natives think about the next seven generations and any decisions made now should be done with the idea of seven generations ahead of time. The deal with this first sort of focus was keeping the promise keeping a promise of those seven generations before us and after us. So we thought about that. We're an academic university and the first one is really focusing on student education and student involvement and native students they have high dropout rates. And so there's anywhere from the Dakotas all over the place anywhere from 50 to 75 percent of high school students don't make it through high school.

[00:07:19] And if they do make it through high school they eventually go on to college they eventually they're the first ones to really drop out of college so there's this real need for retention. It doesn't have to do anything about intelligence and all these other things like that can't make it. It's all the structural the system systematic problems that create barriers for these folks. So the idea was if they make it to Eubie we need to sort of surround them and make sure that they stay here. It was a good sort of bad idea to come up with. What are the support systems that exist to be in those things that don't exist. What can the center do to enhance the retention of native students. So what are some of the things that you are doing. Yeah so one is we have a scholarship so it's a fire scholarship and it took me about a year to get this going. You know because you have to deal with policy of the you know the sort of things. So this is really the first year that awards will be presented. So five students will be awarded some financial assistance and so far scholarship basically what it does if you're working in native communities you don't have to be native to get the scholarship but you do have to be connected in a native community working on health and wellness or other issues then you can qualify for up to five hundred dollars.

[00:08:40] So if you're scholarly work and you have travel or if you need to you'd want to go to a conference and present something or if you're working on a dissertation and you need some money to sort of work in the native community and you need some help there. Wolf our scholarship can help you. And so this year we have five students who are going to be awarded 500 dollars each for their work in native communities and pay paying student loans myself. Five hundred dollars doesn't seem a whole lot when you know thousands of dollars. But. But it's a nice start it's able to help someone just as you're talking about I sort of see that connection with that working together kind of thing. So these are students who need assistance that assistance so you're keeping a promise to them in that way but then they need to do something in return the research or working with native communities. So there's another one of those plants in there. That's a good point. So Native students and Native folks in general you know sort of bred to give back to their community. And I think a lot of times is that some students are supported by their tribes and so they are financially supported. So

there is this really this sort of I say this mandate but internally there's this really need to give back to their tribe which really supported them through their starters. And so I can understand that. So hopefully we can keep that going. And they could give back to the track.

[00:10:13] But I also want to point out another sort of aspect of keeping a promise is that retention in college and that there used to be this idea that if you were a struggling student university and they had study and blog program where you could go for a semester or a few weeks and study something internationally that they would really discourage you from coming. They would say hey it's really taken you off your focus you really need to focus on you know algebra right now. But there was a large study done recently that found out that a study abroad program is an intervention. Is that what happens when students study internationally and experience that whole sort of cultural mix is that they came back stronger student and they had greater completion rates. So my argument is who needs us the most or who don't want to because native students have a pretty poor retention rates are these students native students so part of the scholarship will be to support that as well. So within a few months I have applied for some some money. I'll be traveling to Ireland. So are there other places go on all made students like to go to Mexico or some other places that really have some of those interesting things. But you know they these they speak English. It's good it's safe. It's easy to travel. And there are some similarities in culture you know so my cultural background from Kentucky Cherokee women and men. I don't know if there was a law or what but they married the Irish and said look yeah. So you know it's you know there's terms like black Irish Dutch houses Irish or is that they're being sort of my history is that the harsh folks were fleeing because of the famine. And what was going on in Harlem and the native folks were sort of fleeing these marches like you know everything. The removal act.

[00:12:11] And so it was nice they came together. You know I sort of had this common history anyway. So there's a lot to learn over there. And so I go over there hopefully set up a program to be a month long six credit hours and invite and recruit native students Jubi and as well as Sunni I would like to open it up to Sunni wide for students. As for students at every level undergrad and graduate. Absolutely. It's for any student who's willing to go and to participate in its credit course. One of the barriers is money. So hopefully I can raise some money to support those sort of things as well. Well you know if you know what you're saying about that study it really makes sense. You get out of this same environment and go somewhere else you might get the motivation to say get ideas new ideas and the motivation hey I really want to finish this so I can do that kind of thing. Yeah. You know also there's other studies that say that native folks really have a hard time fitting into the typical academic regime of this. You know you sit forward in a classroom you really you learn a certain way. For me I can just speak for myself I like to be able to do things hands on and watch things so to study abroad and actually stand in a place where all this history was to be able to see it and you know to be out in it is a different style of learning.

[00:13:43] I think that for me it's more exciting and more relevant sort of allows me to withstand some of the not so exciting parts of getting a degree and a higher education institution. So keep that promise is one. Yes. The other one is research. And so you know Evaluation and Research and the data center falls under the Buffalo Center for Social Research and there's huge support there. There's a statistician there and there's a great writer assistant there they do great work. They're just a great resource for anybody or any program that really wants to evaluate the program or really set up these research protocols to evaluate what's going on. And so some of the exciting things going on. And there's you know there's been some past research but one thing that ruined insight about is working with Knox Native American community services we sort of both together or awarded this fellowship with the University of Washington that they have this great grant that's basically going to shepherd us through for two years and at the end of that we'll come out with this research study grant that is ready to propose the NIH to do a study. And so work with NACS there are sort of the same opinion and everything is connected. So the fellowship is connected to HIV prevention. It has

to be connected to some type of mental health. So we're sort of looking at sort of historical traumas related to overall health. And so hopefully within the next two years. KNOX And I will have this nice grant package to be able to put forward NIH and do some research within the community. That's terrific. So is the focus of this grant to get researchers and communities to work together on projects. I think so.

[00:15:40] And it's also sort of the opportunity for underrepresented faculty and researchers to be able to meet with mentors and those folks who have really been successful at doing research. So part of the two years we'll be working with some researchers around the country that work the University of Washington is putting us together shepherding this through. It's a great opportunity to learn from some of them. You know these seasoned researchers have been out in the world. So we have a promise. We have research. And what's the third the final one is promoting peace and social justice. So really what's going on in our community. So this is what this is really an opportunity to work in their community to make a sort of a difference. You know it's one thing to be in academics and try to help the academic folks to do research and all this sort of stuff but if really if you're not working in the community those sort of things what I would call really volunteer of time to me I would really miss out on a lot. So part of this is trying to do things on campus to really support students. You know we plan to have some type of peace drumming to bring a drama on campus and do some of that it's our also our hope that the new president comes to Eubie that we do at gathering or something. Welcome into this territory. And there's even been talk to the talk about giving him a name you know doing something like that just to honor him and welcome and let him know that he's coming to the land at the home of the Shoni.

[00:17:15] You know the six nation there are other things like you know we do some drumming this sit with a drum group and we do some drumming every Wednesday at NACS and it's really just to folks to experience culture that really you know we had been practicing at each other's house. It's as this opportunity to drum and sing and he wrote bad food but now we have a place Native American community services you know allowed us to be there every week. So it's a great opportunity to sort of hit the community. I remember I don't know it was some kind of meeting you were called the way of saying it happened. So how many Native American students are there at Eubie. So that's a good question. So as you know universities it's self reporting so you know they look at those numbers so I was taught to look at it earlier this week. There's 50 who self report being Native American. That's both undergraduate and graduate level Sunnie wide. I think there's over a thousand. Those are self reported. So who knows how many and how many. Thanks. So what are some of the things you're doing to outreach to at least the native students on campus. Yes so there is a student organization for Native American students and they do things like fund raising and they do some also some cultural things but also once a year UBI sort of organizes native bazaar were high school students come from native communities and they get to talk to staff and faculty and they get to hear from other native students how is it is basically a recruitment.

[00:19:01] And then after that there is a sort of a social where there's some dancing and singing and there's some food available so it just sort of this putting on a show hopefully entice some high school students to come he said it sounds like you have some natural pathways and how to connect with native students. OK so I am going to read you a quote and then I'm going to ask you to respond to that. So the quote began QEP let all of that is ended with you die and quote. And I got that quote from your blog. Yes. So this came from recycling. Well I've been studying up on boarding school because of this grant went with an X and reading some stuff and there was a book about the same time that the U.S. was developing policy for Native folks for setting up boarding schools. Ireland was or the British was setting up the same policies for the Irish folks. So they were figuring out how are we going to educate these savages. You know I mean you have to sort of get them up to the American or the British sort of Stanner. So that quote comes out of a commencement speech there was given at Carlisle Indian School that basically there's other been other ways to say it. You know

what is it. Kill the Indian save the man sort of deal. So the idea is to sort of kill the Indian within the Indian so that the American could expose itself you know. So the idea of the boarding school was to is to remove that part of you so you could develop into this civilised intelligent America.

[00:20:50] So that was sort of the policy of the boarding school and that's where that comes from. And so you know you develop a blog which you have to do is get a nice title hopefully to get folks to read it. And so I just use that. But it also came out of what had hit me because I've heard those quotes before. You know what just happened in Tucson with the same folks getting killed there and so the Congress lady who survived a shot in the head. And so everybody is waiting around to see if she sort of recovers and she's the same person. You know what I mean is it well now that her brain has been altered or damaged. Will she be that same person or will she be something different. And that was I guess it sort of hit me as the idea is that the back this policy had to be we had to change basically change what Indians were we had to not so much damage to brain but they had to sort of alter this idea so they wouldn't be Indian anymore. You know I realized that you could kill an Indian or Native American and it doesn't do anything to the Indian ness that they really had to manipulate the living. And that's sort of the policy that the U.S. government was sort of trying to figure out how to do that. They thought the best route was instead of sending out soldiers they would send out teachers you just hear you say that it just sounds like this that this evil program.

[00:22:20] A We have a secret trap that we will spring on these people you know and those efforts that policy and the implementation of that policy to try to get the Indian out of the Indian resolve that it has a pretty deleterious outcomes for native peoples. Think this is a good time I should say that I'm no expert in all this. OK. So I'm learning as I go. So there is great people around who's done a whole lot more work in this. There are some folks are saying Washington has done it. Maria a great horse Braveheart Braveheart has you know looked into all this historical trauma deal but you know there's all kinds of things that happened in schools you know sort of the reading spoke about comparing the hardships that happened with the Irish with this guy who wrote this books basically said it allowed Irish folks to come together and stand strong against the British right. And so that was his argument of you know sort of that's how they survived. The thing about the Native American boarding schools is that I've heard that folks say that you know in some sense it saved their life you know. So you have these Sunday folks who coming out of boarding schools it changed your life in a positive way were others you know just terrible things went on in those schools. And so it's you know you have to not say that every boarding school was it was just terrible and you can't say that every boarding school was great. You know there's just too many of these stories of both of those sites to be able to figure out what was going on.

[00:23:58] So for me I'll try to figure out historical trauma and all these things that lead to poor health and how many generations are going to be worse. You know does that trauma ever stop. You know the argument here is Inox did a good documentary on this is that they interview folks in this territory about their boarding school experiences and just then they talk to the kids and it said you know my mom or my dad really didn't know how to parent because they were sort of manipulated in school. How many more generations is it going to last sort of the effects of that boarding school. But can you really say that it's the boarding school or because there are so many other things you know there is you know you think about that one policy. But to think about just interrupting her whole culture in our way of being you know just relocating all of those things is just you know it's like trying to take the eggs out of a baked cake. You know what I mean. What is it. You know so it's hard just to pinpoint one thing that really said oh if we could really heal from that trauma you know our native schoolhouse would be a much better future. It's hard I guess is a good time to ask you this question since you've been using that term a lot. What exactly is historical trauma. Again there's a lot of folks who have used this sort of theory and I know the university especially in school social work as you know the trauma you know past trauma. So I can say sort of my history has you know I don't want to say that I experienced anything related to any you know.

[00:25:41] But you know I could say that I have sort of my history and growing up I was raised in a traumatic household. You know my mom is Cherokee married an Irish person because I think it's a law in Kentucky and that you know there were the episodes in the house where there was violence and it could be very violent on the kids and you know of my mom. So you know I don't know how you ever sought to adjust the dial or change that or have a kid come out of something like that. Not I don't see damage but not with baggage. I guess you know that's a nice term. So it's hard to say that resulted in this. But you know I sort of went the route of what the statistics say is that I've dropped out of high school I developed an alcohol and drug problem. I was in a homeless shelter for two and a half years. And I finally after APS decided to go to college or somebody was trying to entice me to go to college. You know they've done these tests and they said well you're not college material you know. And so yes Doctor. But I think that's the message. You know did that you know the standardized test and all of that so it upset me so much that I was bound and determined to succeed in college. And so I was angry. Up until a master's degree you know I thought What the heck. You know that was that was over.

[00:27:19] And so in some sense you know you know I heard a guy say one time when you find your purpose in life it gives all other things purpose which means that I feel like I have failed my purpose. And for me to look back and say oh my gosh if I would have changed this or this or this I might not have been here. You know so and looking back I look back and gratitude you know in some sense although there were these terrible things that might happen you know along the way. So I don't know. There's healing sort of found in your purpose. But but there has to be some level of healing that happens get beyond the facts. But every trauma person experience. So in some sense some of that can make you a stronger person. But it always comes back to haunt you. It's you know and so on. I think what I would define high school historical trauma is those events that sort of creep back up Banyen that cause you harm in the present that really there although you're you have enough intelligence and all these sort of strategies to heal from it is that no matter how much you work on that those things can still be exposed. Like when I hear of a story or an injustice or something it changes me to where I can be back when certain things were happening to me. The anger and rage. You know so it's like being able to relive that. And I think that's sort of my layman's terms of what I would consider historical trauma. And so as you told your own story I did see again the circle I can't see how everything is connected.

[00:29:09] Your experience led you to help make others experiences better. Going through is getting through school being productive in the community because of how it changed your life. Yes so I went on a study abroad program. You know I had never been out of my little community. Up until that point and I was going to college. You know I went to community college and then went and got DSW there in that community college. I was living in a homeless shelter. So you know I was on campus trying to be a student worried about oh my gosh I'm going to be found out someone is going follow me back to the homeless shelter. But then I would go back to the homeless shelter and these men there would tutor me. There was a guy in a homeless shelter who had two master degrees in chemistry but his only issue was that he could get a job in chemistry he'd make alcohol and drugs in there. So it can be good at your job that he was a great guy and he helped me through algebra. You know what I mean. And there was just all that that sort of assistance there you know not till folks all the time is that you don't have to be smart to to be successful in college. All it takes is support and motivation really. And so basically when I was sort of I had a guy who fed me lunch and dinner every day for almost a year and a half. Wow. You know what I mean. It is those type of stories that I would say I don't know how I would ever repay either you know.

[00:30:45] And so their deal was don't come a time when it you it's your turn you know. And so it's. You've been listening to Dr. David Paterson discuss the UB school social works Native American Center for Wellness Research and living proof. Hi I'm Nancy Smyth professor and dean at the

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