

# IMO

## MY JOURNEY TO PEER RECOVERY

### **MIND CHANGER**

What drives me to create an Indigenous Peer Recovery Program is the lived experience of almost losing myself to “The Liquid”. I became intrigued with White Bison’s Wellbriety Model as it emphasized on Indigenous concepts and being in a peer recovery community with a family/community centered approach. In the book, *The Red Road to Wellbriety*, it identifies Four Mind Changers. The elders informed that these Four Mind Changers had the power to control our thinking and control our minds. The Four Mind Changers are identified as, a Liquid, a Black Book, a Song, and a Card. As I kept reading more, the Liquid was translated as alcohol, the Black Book was identified as the Bible, the song was identified as ceremony and/or language and the last one, the Card was identified as the Certificate of Indian Blood. These are my interpretations and it made me think how alcohol has destroyed Native American communities, families and relationships across the North American continent.





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## **BIO**

I am of the Water Flows Together clan, born for the Bitter Water clan, my maternal grandfather's clan is Mountain Cove clan and my paternal grandfather's clan is Mexican clan, this is how I identify myself as a Navajo woman. I was born and raised on the Eastern Navajo Reservation in New Mexico. I am a first language speaker. From the moment I came from my mother's womb, I was instilled with Dine Bizaad (Navajo Language). I have witnessed "The Liquid" destroying many families and individuals as well as in my own family. I was raised without running water and electric, I didn't know that I was "poor". I only knew that my Dine family had raised me to be the person I am today. I became a teen mother at 17 years of age. I grew up fast and at times hard, but I was relentless. I lost myself in my teens to drinking and after I became a single parent 12 years ago, I almost lost myself to "The Liquid" again. I had cultural teachings that my late maternal grandparents showed me and taught me, there were many story-telling narratives and oral histories, and these have taught me to be resilient in my journey of life in different cycles.

## **INSPIRATION**

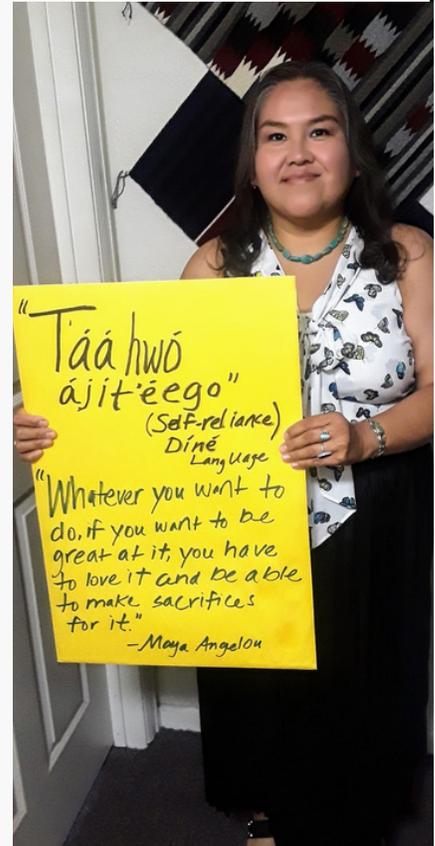
I took part in a week-long behavioral substance abuse summit on the Navajo Nation organized by the Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral Health Services in 2019. I took part in a Talking Circle led by a traditional healer/counselor, and it was one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. The Talking Circles are led by Native American mentors or peer recovery coaches trained by programs that are unique to AI/AN communities. Soon after, I attended a CCAR Embark Peer Recovery Training in Colorado Springs and found out that peer recovery work is not a clinical treatment approach, it is based on a community peer to peer support. I became certified with a CCAR training.

One of these unique programs I later found out from another training is White Bison's Wellbriety Model. I soon found out that many people who took part in this training along with me, had the same stories as I did. . I am now certified in White Bison's Warrior Down, 12 Steps Medicine Wheel and soon will be attending the Mending Broken Hearts Training. We are Indigenous, resilient, we have stories of trauma, lived experience, family, community members who have endured different obstacles to get them to that point in a Wellbriety Training by White Bison.

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## EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION

As a single parent, I was working full-time at the Navajo Department of Law Enforcement at a dispatcher and felt empty, something was missing in my life, and I was losing myself to "The Liquid". So, I signed myself up for school at Dine College, formerly known as Navajo Community College (tribal college). I finished with an AAS in Social & Behavioral Sciences with Dine College, then felt that the two- year degree was not enough to support my family of five and pursued my BA in Anthropology at Fort Lewis College in Durango. I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology in 2017, I sought employment for one year in Durango, CO, I ended up doing temp work. Discouraged in finding employment, I signed up for the University of Denver's Four Corners Graduate School of Social Work, located in Durango, CO. I was shocked when I got accepted, because I am this little woman from the Navajo reservation, thinking I would not be "good" enough to get into graduate school. I finished my Master of Social Work Degree two years ago during the pandemic.



It took me a combined 10 years to earn the degree and support four children as a single parent, however, I had help from my mother and eldest daughter watching over my children and helping raise them. During my grad school I was hired with Axis Health System for internship work, there I briefly worked as a peer support specialist with the Crisis Response Team, soon after, became a case manager/intern therapist for the Co-Occurring Disorder Treatment program. My combined work experience as a public safety dispatcher, case manager/intern therapist, peer support specialist, the education and training I received and my lived experience as a Native American woman living in a community among other Native Americans gave me insight and inspiration to become the Program Manager for the Indigenous Peer Recovery Program with Southwestern Colorado Area Health Education Center. . I am doing this for my family, grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles and our children in southwest Colorado, which is very diverse. My passion is my love for social work in a community setting. Thank you for taking the time to look at our page. May you continue to walk in beauty...

## **Southwest Colorado Land Acknowledgement**

**Today, we acknowledge that the ground beneath our feet is historically the home of Indigenous Peoples. It is the ancestral lands of the Puebloan, Ute tribes and Dine, who have occupied this land before colonization.**

**The Weenuchiu band are now recognized as Ute Mountain Utes who are located in Towaoc just outside of Cortez, Colorado. The Mouache and Caputa bands make up the Southern Ute Indian Tribe of Ignacio, Colorado. Hesperus Peak, located just west of Durango, is the tallest peak in the La Plata mountain range, and is identified as one of the four sacred mountains by the Dine people, aka Navajo.**

**The history of these lands have been told from a western perspective, without fully acknowledging the indigenous people who occupied this land before it was La Plata County and Montezuma County. It is imperative to know that we are living and working on stolen lands.**

**We are here to create a peaceful environment for all and to be inclusive of history, culture, and humanity. Thank you for acknowledging the history of lands with us.**

***-Imo Succo, Dine***