CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH
The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY), created by former US Senator Byron Dorgan with $1 million from his excess campaign funds, is dedicated to improving the lives of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth. As a policy program at the Aspen Institute, the goal of the CNAY is to bring greater national attention to the issues facing AI/AN youth through communication, resource exchange, policy development, and advocacy.

GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT – NATIVE YOUTH PRIORITY
To date, the CNAY has conducted over 60 roundtables in more than 14 states with several hundred tribes represented. This outreach provides an opportunity to engage the youth perspective, as well as convene tribal leaders, parents, school administrators, health professionals, and all those who have a stake in improving the lives of AI/AN youth. Through this work we have identified grief and loss as a priority issue for youth in tribal and urban Indian communities. Thus, the CNAY and the New York Life Foundation are partnering on an effort to encourage mutual understanding, resource exchange, and develop a strategy for expanding grief, loss, and bereavement programming for AI/AN youth.

The goal of the project is to better understand existing initiatives and diverse perspectives for addressing grief and bereavement needs of AI/AN youth. Our goal is to create connections between bereavement programs and tribal communities as well as develop recommendations and strategies for expanding bereavement resources to more young people in tribal and urban Indian communities.

BEREAVEMENT PROJECT COMPONENTS
This project is comprised of multiple stages, including research and scan of existing programs; engagement of our current partners; outreach to Indian Country and AI/AN youth; a survey of existing non-Indian specific grief programs and organizations; key informant interviews with various experts throughout Indian Country; and a convening of experts and key stakeholders to develop a strategy to expand grief and bereavement resources to Indian Country.

To date, as a part of this project the CNAY has conducted the following:

- Literature review and initial grief and bereavement research;
- Interviews with over 20 federal and national tribal organization partners;
- Outreach to thousands of tribal leaders and regional tribal organizations introducing the project;
Native youth and community engagement through CNAY roundtables in Indian Country;
Two focus groups with youth service providers, AI/AN youth, and tribal leaders to identify, discuss, and strategize about impactful approaches for grief and bereavement resources in Indian Country; and
Outreach and project introduction to over 1000 non-Indian specific grief programs and networks to learn about existing work with tribal and urban Indian communities, and encourage consideration of AI/AN youth needs in their work.

BEREAVEMENT PROJECT THEMES
The CNAY has identified an initial series of themes, including barriers and recommendations for addressing the needs of grieving AI/AN youth. Below is a sample summary of our current findings:

- Bereavement and grief in Indian Country is as much a result of historical trauma through loss of land, culture and language as it is loss of a friend or loved one.
- Lack of financial and mental health resources in Indian Country is a leading barrier in expanding grief and bereavement resources to AI/AN youth.
- Many tribes wish to include more grief and bereavement programming in their communities but are unsure of any existing resources in their area.
- Tribes and Native communities are incredibly diverse and unique in the way youth deal with grief and loss.
- Peer-to-peer mentoring models and programming that involves the whole family is highly recommended and preferred by AI/AN youth.
- In a survey developed by the CNAY, non-Indian specific grief programs and service providers reported that only 48.65% of programs were currently serving AI/AN youth, but 79.31% welcome opportunities to include them in future work.

NEXT STEPS: CONVENING
On October 9th, the CNAY will host a convening of key AI/AN youth stakeholders and bereavement experts to identify and develop tangible recommendations for expanding and incorporating grief, loss, and bereavement programming in Indian Country. The agenda will consist of a project overview, a presentation of existing data and knowledge, a discussion of diverse perspectives, and a moderated conversation towards mapping future directions. The goal is to develop recommendations for channeling new resources to address bereavement and grief in Indian Country.

STAY CONNECTED AND GET INVOLVED:
If you are interested in participating in this project or to learn about future opportunities to collaborate with the Center for Native American Youth, please contact us at cnayinfo@aspeninstitute.org or (202) 736-2905. More information available at: www.CNAY.org.