

**INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE  
2020 RICK SMITH INJURY PREVENTION AWARD  
DEBBIE WHITEGRASS BULLSHOE**



Motor Vehicle Crashes (MVCs) are the leading cause of injury mortality on the Blackfeet Reservation. Debbie White Grass Bull Shoe, Tribal Injury Prevention Cooperative Agreement Program (TIPCAP) coordinator, led the Blackfeet Nation in addressing MVCs on the reservation. Through her work Debbie identified areas which needed to be addressed by understanding local contributing factors to MVCs. Through effective partnerships, obtaining and sharing data, she was able to promote and implement effective strategies to prevent MVCs on the Blackfeet Reservation, while also improving partnerships within the Tribe, the State, and others, to achieve their goal in reducing injuries. Efforts focused on MVC safety education for youth in local schools and community members, training Child Passenger Safety (CPS) technicians, hosting car seat check events and providing child safety seats, creating an active injury prevention coalition and offering training to the event staff.

Starting in 2015, Debbie got to work establishing partnerships and MOU'S with Tribal Court, Blackfeet Head Start, the Blackfeet CHR program, Browning Public Schools, Heart Butte Public Schools, and other Tribal and State programs. She worked hard to build a strong injury prevention coalition to develop these partnerships, a major achievement for the Blackfeet Nation. Together they planned and conducted staff, program and community membership training with certifications, community outreach events, a policy ordinance amendment, a proposal to increase enforcement, mass media campaigns, and data collection; all effective strategies in reducing MVCs on the Blackfeet reservation.

To keep children safe while traveling, over 222 child safety seats were provided to parents and caregivers at car seat clinics and checkups. To facilitate gathering accurate data about seat belt use in the community, Debbie organized events for staff made up of representatives from different Tribal programs and community members. On a given day, the staff conducted seat belt use observations at 12 locations, allowing the program to collect 3,600 observations at a given time.

Involving the community, often in innovative ways, has been an essential part of Debbie's work. For example, in one day the program involved between 1,500-2,000 participants in activities about impaired driving and seat belt use. The program participated in three different youth days across their community. At community street dances Debbie and partners led trivia games about the seat belt ordinance and signing seat belt pledges. Thanks to partnerships with local public schools, the program also went into high schools to educate teens about distracted and impaired driving with the "In One Instant" video and signing pledges. When it came to seat belts and impaired driving education, the program found ways to encourage individuals to make the right choice. At all events, community members pledged to "honor myself, honor my family, honor my community and buckle up". These pledges were successful in encouraging people to think deeply about wearing their seat belt. Over 2,000 people of all ages signed pledges.

Primary seat belt laws, seatbelt observations, mass media campaigns and community events are one of the most effective strategies for increasing seat belt use, but passage of new ordinances take much time and effort. Debbie worked tirelessly to promote and encourage passage of an amended primary seat belt law on the Blackfeet Reservation. Support of this law was obtained through surveying over 300 students, promoting the new law through various events, media campaigns, as well as a newly erected billboard reaching over 15,000 individuals. This culturally tailored billboard was a highly visible success through the community, strategically placed at the busiest intersection and showcasing symbols that are important to the Blackfeet Nation. The billboard featured the work of a local Blackfeet artist. The art was made with ledger paper, a celebrated medium in the community with a rich history, and with images of a native woman riding a horse and a child in a cradleboard. The billboard heading read 'We've always traveled safe'. Debbie collaborated with Safe On All Roads, Glacier Electric Co-Op, who donated the poles, equipment and labor for the billboard. The program was able to save about \$15,000, thanks to Glacier Electric. The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council and Land Department approved the use of the land where the billboard is located. The program recently received a new approval for the billboard land use for the next five years.

In 2017, Debbie's leadership worked on the primary seat belt law, known as Ordinance 85, Blackfeet Tribal Safety Belt/Infant Child Passenger Restraint Law. In March 2018, the injury prevention coalition worked with the Tribal Council and legal department to amend the Ordinance 85 and mandate two safety check points and be codified. Utilizing the event staff, data collected from the seatbelt observations and surveys were used to assist with supporting the amendment of Ordinance 85. The billboard called viewers to "Buckle Up" in accordance with Ordinance 85.

For Debbie, being creative and passionate about injury prevention work means sharing the message that all lives are important. One way was through data sharing. Many challenges were encountered in obtaining and sharing crash data. Seatbelt observation data the program collected was used, providing education to the community and guidance for the program. Different strategies and tactics were used to address many barriers with sharing crash data from other programs. But Debbie never relented, always keeping the invitation and door open for community members and programs to sit with the program and collaborate.

Through the injury prevention coalition's efforts, one of the program's most important accomplishments was a measured increase in seat belt use. Seat belt use data collected through observations were analyzed to evaluate the change over time. From 2015 to 2019, driver seatbelt usage rates increased from 17% to 39%. This represents a 22% change, or a 129% increase in seatbelt use.

The program accomplishments under Debbie's leadership and coordination have impacted the Blackfeet Nation and reservation in positive ways. In the short term, there was an increase in awareness of the dangers of unsafe driving and on the benefits of using vehicle restraints. This new awareness influenced seat belt use in a community that has had historically low restraint use. In the long term, Debbie's work on billboards, pledges, trainings, partnerships, and coalitions led to an amendment of the primary law ordinance, mandating safety check points which will last far beyond the TIPCAP funding period. Tribes in the Billings Area have also benefited from Debbie's work, through the regular sharing of successes and challenges, which has influenced injury prevention work within her own Tribe and many others.