



INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

A decade ago, EBCI confronted an epidemic of overdose-caused fatalities among its members.¹ In response, in 2015 EBCI's Cherokee Indian Health Authority (CIHA) commenced universal screening of its patients to determine the prevalence of substance misuse and launched Analenisgi (an integrated behavioral health program) and Kanvwotiyi (a residential substance abuse treatment center) to treat them.² In tandem, EBCI TERO established the Mother Town Healing Program (MTHP), a groundbreaking, "recovery-centered" workforce development program to "assist EBCI enrolled members in recovery by providing a safe and supportive working environment, training for necessary job skills, and discipline to re-enter the workforce in a positive manner."³ MTHP recognizes job readiness and steady employment as essential to *sustained* recovery,⁴ accepting individuals who are 90 days sober and enrolled in Analenisgi's therapeutic services.⁵ For the first 5-9 months, participants are paid to work five days per week on community projects such as landscaping, home improvement projects for EBCI members, and tending to MTHP's community garden; time not working is spent in recovery classes, learning life and job skills, developing adaptive behaviors, and goal setting.⁶ Those who demonstrate "progress and readiness" are then placed in three-month paid internships with EBCI programs and other MTHP partner entities.⁷ Successful interns are often hired by their internship sites; some also become Peer Mentors to incoming MTHP cohorts.⁸ MTHP provides participants with modest financial assistance to initially help them make ends meet, work clothes and boots (through a partnership with Cherokee Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Services), and two nutritious meals each day (through a partnership with CIHA); it also helps them remove common employment barriers.⁹ MTHP boasts a 74% program completion rate, with 86% of program graduates still working and in recovery, building on the firm foundation of job skills, healthy life skills, community/cultural reconnection, and sense of purpose that MTHP instilled in them.¹⁰ To strengthen MTHP clients' odds of success, EBCI TERO is spearheading Project Phoenix, an initiative to amend the EBCI Code of Ordinances to expunge clients' non-violent and drug-related convictions so they can more easily obtain tribal employment.¹¹

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RELATED RESOURCES

[EBCI Mother Town Healing Program](#)

[EBCI TERO Mother Town Healing Program \(PowerPoint Presentation\)](#)

[CTER National Conference 2022: EBCI TERO Mother Town Healing Program \(PowerPoint Presentation\)](#)

["What is MTHP?" Overview](#)

[EBCI Mother Town Healing Program Application](#)

[Cherokee One Feather: Mother Town Healing Program showing success rate](#)

[Cherokee One Feather: Job Corps, Mother Town Healing Project form partnership](#)

¹ Terri Henry, TERO Director, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), Conversation with NCAI, June 28, 2024.

² According to EBCI, the Band and its surrounding region of western North Carolina “have been heavily impacted by substance misuse and overdose,” with an unintentional poisoning mortality rate of 24.4%, which far exceeds the statewide rate for the years 2012 to 2016 (EBCI TERO, “Mother Town Healing Program,” PowerPoint Presentation, Rocky Mountain Regional TERO Conference, Riverton, Wyoming, March 27, 2024, slide 6).

³ EBCI, “Mother Town Healing Program” website (<https://ebci-tero.com/mothertown/>, accessed July 31, 2024).

⁴ EBCI TERO, “Mother Town Healing Program,” PowerPoint Presentation, March 27, 2024, slide 18. According to Henry, “Working is a key lever for recovery and sustained income is critical to addressing the economic challenges and resulting stress that drive many into substance use or relapse” (Conversation with NCAI, June 28, 2024). As the MHTP website explains, “Chronic unemployment is common among populations with current and past histories of substance use disorder. Employment provides many incentives for sustained recovery, including financial, personal meaning, social support, structure, responsibility and a sense of achievement” (EBCI, “Mother Town Healing Program” website). One MHTP participant summarized it this way: “It was awesome because I didn’t have to pick between getting a job and continuing to work on my recovery” (Cherokee One Feather, “Mother Town Healing Program showing success rate,” February 14, 2019

(<https://theonefeather.com/2019/02/14/mother-town-healing-program-showing-success-rate/>, accessed July 31, 2024)).

⁵ MHTP accepts enrolled members of EBCI and other federally recognized Tribal Nations. Most MHTP participants are referred by Analenisgi or they walk in off the street. MHTP also will accept individuals who have been in a residential treatment facility or jail for at least 30 days (Henry, Conversation with NCAI, June 28, 2024). Incoming participants also must not be currently employed or own/operate their own business, and they must continue to attend their recovery programs during the entirety of their involvement with MHTP (EBCI, “Mother Town Healing Program” website).

⁶ Henry, Conversation with NCAI, June 28, 2024; Cherokee One Feather, “Mother Town Healing Program showing success rate,” February 14, 2019. Participants work four days each week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday) from 7:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (Ibid.). The education of the MHTP program includes soft skills training, which was initially provided by a local community college but is now provided internally by MHTP staff. Meanwhile, the community projects “let the community see these people in a new light. Even though they might have known what they were like in their using days, they see them working hard, participating, volunteering and doing things for the community. That shows them that these people just want a chance” (Ibid.).

⁷ EBCI TERO, “Mother Town Healing Program,” PowerPoint Presentation, CTER National Conference, Tulsa, Oklahoma, August 11, 2022, slide 20. According to Henry, MHTP works with the internship placement sites to ensure the interns “do meaningful, rewarding work, not scut work” (Conversation with NCAI, June 28, 2024).

⁸ EBCI, “Mother Town Healing Program” website. MHTP participants have eventually been hired by the Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority, Cherokee Central Schools, Oconaluftee Job Corps, Cherokee Boy’s Club, and various EBCI Tribal Programs, including TERO and MHTP (EBCI, “What is Mother Town Healing Program?”, July 31, 2024, pp. 1-2). According to former MHTP Supervisor Billie Jo Rich, “They can go into these programs and provide extra help and the programs don’t have to pay for them so they get extra help with work that they need done and the employees get that hands-on learning work experience. So, when the positions come open, ideally, our participants will have a better shot at getting those positions because they already have experience doing the work” (Cherokee One Feather, “Mother Town Healing Program showing success rate,” February 14, 2019).

⁹ Henry, Conversation with NCAI, June 28, 2024. These include helping them to resolve their outstanding legal issues and court fines and reinstate or obtain a driver’s license (EBCI, “What is Mother Town Healing Program?”, July 31, 2024, p. 3). Eligible participants also can receive temporary housing in EBCI’s new Men’s House and Women’s House.

¹⁰ EBCI, “What is Mother Town Healing Program?”, July 31, 2024, pp. 1 and 3. Many MHTP participants also achieve success beyond work, such as regaining visitation/custody rights with their children, becoming homeowners, buying their first vehicles, and taking their first family vacations with their children (Ibid., p. 3).

¹¹ EBCI TERO, “Mother Town Healing Program,” PowerPoint Presentation, March 27, 2024, slide 32.