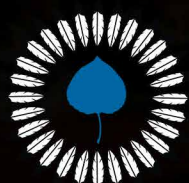


STATE OF
NATIVE
YOUTH
2016

DRAWING STRENGTH FROM OUR CULTURES



CENTER FOR NATIVE
AMERICAN YOUTH
AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

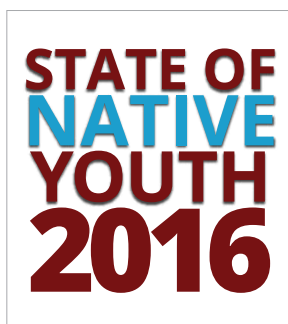


Drawing Strength From Our Cultures

STATE OF NATIVE YOUTH REPORT

December 2016

**The Center for Native American Youth
at The Aspen Institute**



Front and back cover art by **Christie Wildcat**, *Northern Arapaho Tribe*, 2016 Center for Native American Youth Champion for Change.

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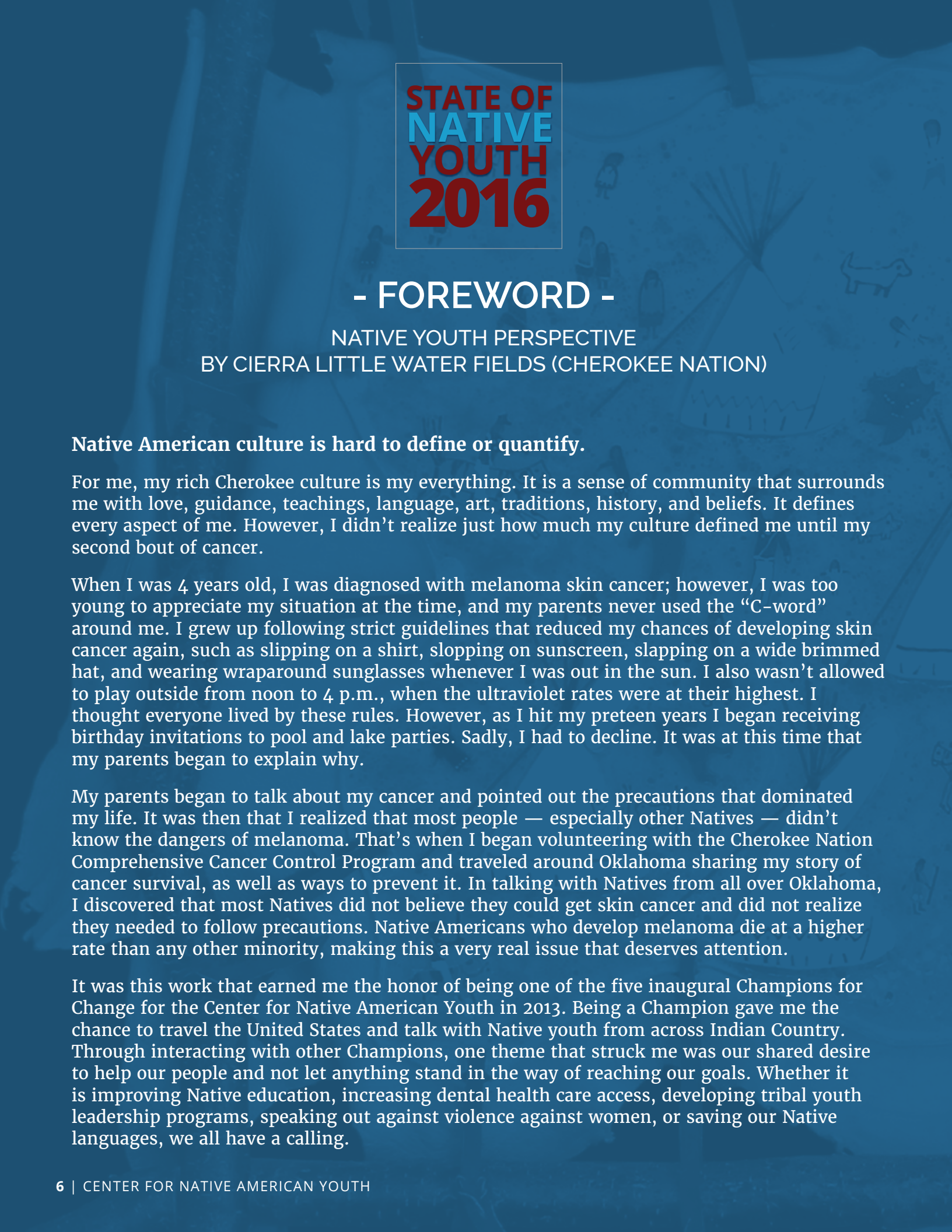
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This publication may be downloaded from <http://www.cnay.org>. For more information about the report or the Generation Indigenous Online Roundtable Survey, please contact us at 202-736-2905 or via email at cnayinfo@aspeninstitute.org.

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STATE OF NATIVE YOUTH 2016

- FOREWORD -

NATIVE YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

BY CIERRA LITTLE WATER FIELDS (CHEROKEE NATION)

Native American culture is hard to define or quantify.

For me, my rich Cherokee culture is my everything. It is a sense of community that surrounds me with love, guidance, teachings, language, art, traditions, history, and beliefs. It defines every aspect of me. However, I didn't realize just how much my culture defined me until my second bout of cancer.

When I was 4 years old, I was diagnosed with melanoma skin cancer; however, I was too young to appreciate my situation at the time, and my parents never used the "C-word" around me. I grew up following strict guidelines that reduced my chances of developing skin cancer again, such as slipping on a shirt, slopping on sunscreen, slapping on a wide brimmed hat, and wearing wraparound sunglasses whenever I was out in the sun. I also wasn't allowed to play outside from noon to 4 p.m., when the ultraviolet rates were at their highest. I thought everyone lived by these rules. However, as I hit my preteen years I began receiving birthday invitations to pool and lake parties. Sadly, I had to decline. It was at this time that my parents began to explain why.

My parents began to talk about my cancer and pointed out the precautions that dominated my life. It was then that I realized that most people — especially other Natives — didn't know the dangers of melanoma. That's when I began volunteering with the Cherokee Nation Comprehensive Cancer Control Program and traveled around Oklahoma sharing my story of cancer survival, as well as ways to prevent it. In talking with Natives from all over Oklahoma, I discovered that most Natives did not believe they could get skin cancer and did not realize they needed to follow precautions. Native Americans who develop melanoma die at a higher rate than any other minority, making this a very real issue that deserves attention.

It was this work that earned me the honor of being one of the five inaugural Champions for Change for the Center for Native American Youth in 2013. Being a Champion gave me the chance to travel the United States and talk with Native youth from across Indian Country. Through interacting with other Champions, one theme that struck me was our shared desire to help our people and not let anything stand in the way of reaching our goals. Whether it is improving Native education, increasing dental health care access, developing tribal youth leadership programs, speaking out against violence against women, or saving our Native languages, we all have a calling.



Native youth from tribal communities have heard this calling, too. We are addressing issues as wide-reaching as suicide, access to health care, investigating missing and murdered Indigenous women, and promoting healthy lifestyles, to name only a few. At the Muscogee Nation, youth like Jay Fife are working on ending domestic violence and sexual assault among Native women. Sarah De Herrera, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, created the program, “Mentorship in the Digital Age,” to help connect rural Natives with peers in California. Dyami Thomas and his sister, Rebecca Kirk, Klamath and Leech Lake Ojibwe, travel the US working on suicide prevention as certified peer counselors. The list of these young Native change-makers goes on and on—and this is why we’re inspiring one another.

Native Americans draw strength from our cultures and each one of us is surrounded by rich traditions that, thanks to our ancestors, have survived colonialism, disease, boarding schools, and acculturation. Our tribal cultures ground us by keeping us connected through heritage, language, art, stories, traditions, and religious or spiritual practices. We also draw strength from our elders, who have cleared the path before us and encourage forging new paths forward.

As the **Seventh Generation** moves forward to bring about change, we need the federal government to honor our treaties, guarantee our sovereignty, provide opportunities for education and economic development, and — most important — respect our abilities to decide how best to move our tribal communities forward.

Cierra Little Water Fields is a 2013 Center for Native American Youth Champion for Change. She has also been honored as a 2016 White House Changemaker at the first-ever United State of Women Summit for her advocate work in sexual assault prevention. Additionally, Cierra was inaugurated as by the United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY) as one of their “25 Under 25” in the most recent class of honorees.

- FOREWORD -


TRIBAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

BY ROBERT R. MCGHEE (VICE CHAIRMAN, POARCH BAND OF
CREEK INDIANS TRIBAL COUNCIL)

It was an honor for me to be invited to write a foreword for this important new report. As I reflected on the theme for the report this year, I remembered something that I have heard many times that is still very relevant today: *if you don't know where you came from how can you know where you're going?* With over 560 Tribes and Alaska Native villages, all possessing unique histories and cultural backgrounds, it is often difficult to determine one unified approach to overcome challenges and obstacles we face across **Indian Country**. But our sovereign nations possess one unique distinction that contributes to our resilience: *community*.

We as Native Americans understand that we cannot move forward without the help or assistance of our peers, families, elders and communities as a whole. This unique cultural bond is evident on the historical lands of the Standing Rock Sioux Nation. At this very moment, thousands of Native Americans, including hundreds of Native youth, have joined together to oppose and overcome a great challenge—the desecration of sacred sites and potential contamination of waterways with the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. No matter the outcome of this conflict, the strength of what's happening at Standing Rock is that our greater community became part of theirs—Native youth standing together with adults and elders from across Indian Country.





Native youth are strong, smart, and resilient. Our history and past have proven what obstacles and challenges we can overcome. However, it is our cultures and unique values that set us apart from others in this country and give strength to our youth. It's that common thread of knowing what the beat of a drum means within our soul. It's the understanding of what our lands mean to our existence. It's the fulfillment of peace when we see an eagle soaring high. Youth are the ones who will carry forward the knowledge and understanding that everything is impacted by our actions as caretakers of this earth.


Unfortunately, I believe we as adults have failed our youth in some ways. We have not always taken the opportunity to listen to their needs in our communities. Our strength comes from our faith in the resilience of our people, but if our communities are broken and not able to address the challenges and obstacles they face, how can we expect our youth to rely on them? We as leaders need to recognize that our people and communities are suffering, and I think it is time we ask Native youth for help. Help us once again hear the beat of a drum, protect our lands, and bring peace to our people.

As a tribal leader I know I have made mistakes, but what helped me overcome obstacles in my life were the lessons taught by my elders and my community standing together for a common purpose. Our elders teach us where we come from, but our youth are our guides for where we are going. When I see our youth leading the kinds of initiatives that you will read about in this report, it shows me how strong our future in Indian Country will be. For tribal leaders like myself to have the courage to tackle our biggest challenges, we must look to our youth for inspiration. They are finding the courage by drawing strength from our cultures and our ancestors who walked before us. This is why I am a proud advocate for our youth and I invite other tribal leaders to join me in shining a spotlight on their strengths.

Robert McGhee is the Vice Chairman of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Vice President of United South and Eastern Tribes, and a member of the Board of Advisors at the Center for Native American Youth at The Aspen Institute.

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INTRODUCTION & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"We seem to undervalue how important our cultural values are and how important it is to sustain. Sometimes I notice we are envious of each other's successes. We need to overcome our own low aspirations, and cheer on each other so we can become our own teachers, principals, nurses, and business owners. This will revive our tribes, our villages, and our families."

- NATIVE YOUTH, GENERATION INDIGENOUS SURVEY

Too often, the lives of **Native American** youth are understood through a narrow media lens that focuses almost exclusively on disparities and the challenges that face them, and very little on solutions. This leaves the public feeling that the barriers in front of Native **youth** are intractable — their situation, hopeless.

This could not be further from the truth. Native youth are accomplishing incredible things together across the country every day. They are drawing strength from their cultures to help revive their languages, improve their peers' outcomes in schools, improve their communities' health by bringing back traditional foods, and reach out and give hope to other youth when hope is hard to find.

Every year, the Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) travels to tribal communities

across the country to meet directly with youth and the community members who support them. We hold roundtables and meetings with educators and service providers, tribal leaders, and other stakeholders who can help us understand Native youth challenges and priorities. More important, these meetings help us identify solutions — especially those led by youth themselves. Since our founding, we have visited 260 tribal communities in 24 states. What we learn in these communities drives our work.

The positive spotlight that we shine on Native American youth across the country is even more critical in the wake of an election that has exposed deep divisions and misunderstandings about some of our nation's most vulnerable communities. While we

See Glossary on page 44 for a definition of highlighted **terms**.

grapple with finding a way forward to heal some of these divisions, we know that Native youth have a tremendous ability to lift up, support, and inspire not just one another—but our nation as a whole.

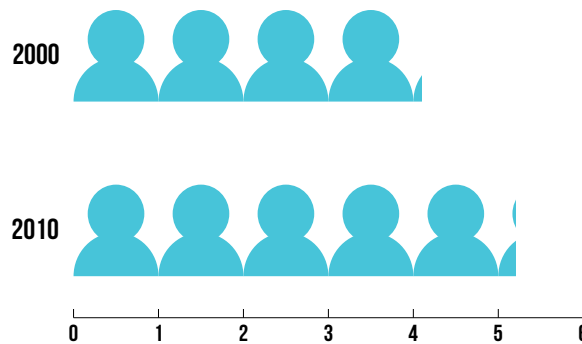
This year, CNAY wanted to hear from even more of our stakeholders. That is why we launched the first-ever Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) online roundtable, a new online survey for Native youth that asks them to identify the priorities that matter to them and the resources that will help them succeed. We fielded this survey over the summer and heard from nearly 700 Native youth under the age of 25. Throughout this report, we'll be sharing the results of this survey.

This is the first in a new yearly series of reports we're calling *The State of Native Youth*. Every year, we will share what we learn through our community meetings, surveys, and other work with Native youth throughout the country. We will also analyze the latest data and indicators of Native youth opportunity and success. Finally, and most important, this report will be a platform to lift up the voice of Native youth advocates and highlight the programs across **Indian Country** and the rest of the United States that are working to improve their lives.

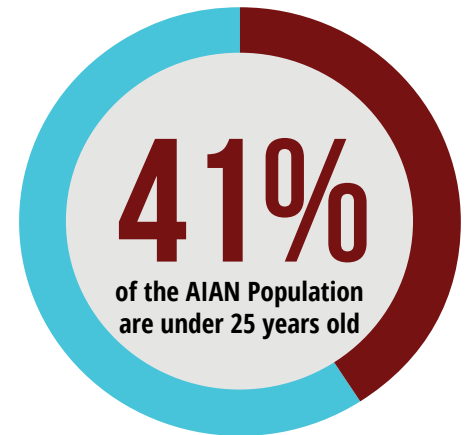
Native Americans are a young and fast-growing population. According to the US Census Bureau, youth under the age of 25 compose 41 percent of the entire population of 5.4 million **American Indians and Alaska**

A YOUNG, FAST-GROWING POPULATION

AIAN Population (in millions)



Sources: US Census Bureau, American Factfinder, "Selected Population Profile in the United States 2014: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates: American Indian and Alaska Native Alone or in Combination With One or More Other Races (300, A01-299) & (100-299) or (300, A01-299) or (400-999)," 2014, <http://factfinder.census.gov>; 2010 Census Summary File 1—Technical Documentation/prepared by the US Census Bureau, Revised 2012.



Natives (AIAN).¹ The median age among AIAN was 31 years as of 2015, compared with 37.4 years for the overall US population.² Between the 2000 and 2010 US Censuses, the total AIAN population grew from 4.1 million to 5.2 million people, a 27 percent increase.³ During the same period, the overall US population grew by about 9.7 percent.⁴

Unfortunately, this population is also one of the most at-risk populations in the U.S. Due to enduring intergenerational trauma resulting from genocide,⁵ forced relocation,⁶ the boarding school system,⁷ and other devastating policies,⁸ Native youth today often live in communities that are disproportionately affected by high rates of poverty, unemployment, health disparities, substance abuse, low education attainment, family violence, and crime that includes elevated youth gang activity.⁹

*The shockingly high rate of suicide among Native youth, which is two and a half times the national rate and the second-leading cause of death for these young people, reflects the impact of these combined burdens.*¹⁰

Because of this widespread epidemic among Native Youth, suicide prevention remains at the heart of CNAY's mission.

Despite these substantial hardships and barriers, Native youth draw incredible strength and resilience from their culture. Having a strong ethnic identity and cultural affiliation have widely been cited as protective factors for mental health, particularly among youth of color including Native American youth.¹¹ In fact, recent studies have linked high prosocial behaviors and resiliency among Native youth to connectedness with culture, family, and community.¹² The majority of our surveyed respondents selected culture and language as their No. 1 priority.¹³

Looking back, 2016 was a busy and inspiring one for Native youth. The following are some of the key themes and issues that emerged from our work with Native youth this year.

A DEFINING MOMENT FOR A GENERATION AT STANDING ROCK

This summer, a group of Native American youth from the Standing Rock reservation put on their running shoes and took to the road. Two thousand miles later, they ended up in Washington, DC, and delivered a petition to the Army Corps of Engineers to protest approval of the Dakota Access Pipeline, a project that threatened their waterways and many of their sacred sites. Since then, tribal

nations and allies from around the world have gathered at the Standing Rock reservation to take a stand together, camping in peace and prayer. Native youth are in the forefront of similar movements across the country, from the efforts to protect Bears Ears in Utah from drilling to those to protect Oak Flat in Arizona from foreign mining. Standing Rock has become a defining moment of this generation and represents a real and clear priority of Native youth to protect their sacred sites, lands, and waterways.

BUILDING ON THE SUCCESS OF GENERATION INDIGENOUS — A NEW LEVEL OF NATIVE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The actions and voice of Native youth helped spark a stand for all of Indian Country at Standing Rock. This kind engagement is at the heart of Generation Indigenous (Gen-I), the cross-sector initiative launched by President Obama in 2014 to focus on strengthening resources for Native youth and building new platforms where they can share their voice, recognize one another, and inspire positive change. Although the Obama administration helped jumpstart this platform for engagement, Gen-I has transformed from an initiative into a youth-led movement. In November, the Gen-I National Youth Network and the First Kids 1st coalition sent a letter to the next president outlining their key priorities for Native youth in the next administration.¹⁴ As the new president and administration take office, we hope they will continue President Obama's commitment to Native youth.


PUTTING CULTURE AT THE CENTER OF OUR CHILD WELFARE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEMS

For generations, the focus of federal policy toward Native children and families was one of assimilation. Children were forcibly taken from their families and placed in residential boarding schools where they were severely punished for speaking their language and practicing their traditions, and non-Native child welfare systems aggressively broke apart families by placing Native children in non-Native homes, depriving them of the cultural and family supports in their home communities. Today, Native children are entangled at alarmingly high rates in both the foster care and juvenile justice systems. That's why youth are speaking out and taking initiative to help our communities and families heal from this intergenerational trauma, build resilience, and advocate for strengthening the protections of critical laws like the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) that emphasize cultural connectedness and family placement.

NEW FEDERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN NATIVE LANGUAGES

In late 2015, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act, the new comprehensive reauthorization of federal education programs (formerly the No Child Left Behind Act). The law provides unprecedented new resources for public schools to develop and strengthen Native language immersion programs. It also provides resources to study best practices in Native language programming. As reflected throughout our new online survey and during our community roundtable conversations, access to Native languages is a key priority for Native youth across the country and many of the most promising language initiatives are being led and supported by Native youth. By taking advantage of these opportunities, Native youth are helping heal past eras like the boarding school system and build new, culturally affirming opportunities for future generations.

Native American youth showcase the resilience of our tribal cultures across the country every day. As you read this report, we hope you will be inspired and can help us celebrate their positive efforts to tackle challenges and contribute to a strong future for our tribal communities.



"[Native Youth] have so much promise – and we need to ensure that they have every tool, every opportunity they need to fulfill that promise."

**- FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA
AT THE 2015 WHITE HOUSE GEN-I CONVENING**

(ENDNOTES)

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Native youth with the U.S. Secretary of the Department of Interior participating in an exercise dance called “Powwow Sweat” at the 2016 White House Tribal Youth Gathering. Left to right: Sarah Scott (Lumbee Tribe), Jared Massey (White Mountain Apache Tribe & Navajo Nation), U.S. Secretary Sally Jewell, and Brayden White (St. Regis Mohawk Tribe).

CHAPTER ONE

HEALTH & WELLNESS

In Arizona, 24-year old Jesse Pablo works with Project Oidag and uses tribal songs and stories to teach traditional agricultural practices and healthy lifestyles to Tohono O'odham youth. Native youth like Jesse are on the front lines of tackling the myriad health disparities faced by Native youth and their communities. In our recent online survey, over 400 youth ranked health and wellness as one of their top 10 issue priorities.

Native youth experience serious health challenges, especially because they struggle with their health at very young ages. On average, 40 to 50 percent of Native AIAN children are overweight or obese by the time they turn 10, the highest prevalence of any racial/ethnic group.¹ Between 1990 and 2009, diabetes diagnoses for AIAN youth between 15 and 19 years old increased by 110 percent.² Native teens between 12 and 17 years old have the highest prevalence of major depressive episodes,³ and the suicide rate hovers around 2.5 times that of any other US population group, with suicide being the second-leading cause of death for Native youth between the ages of 15 and 24.⁴

NATIVE AMERICANS STILL LEFT FAR BEHIND IN HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

Disparities in access to care contribute significantly to poor health outcomes for Native youth. Though the Indian Health Service (IHS) is the primary health care source for many members of federally recognized tribes, IHS remains a discretionary program, historically underfunded by Congress.⁵ New investments in contract support

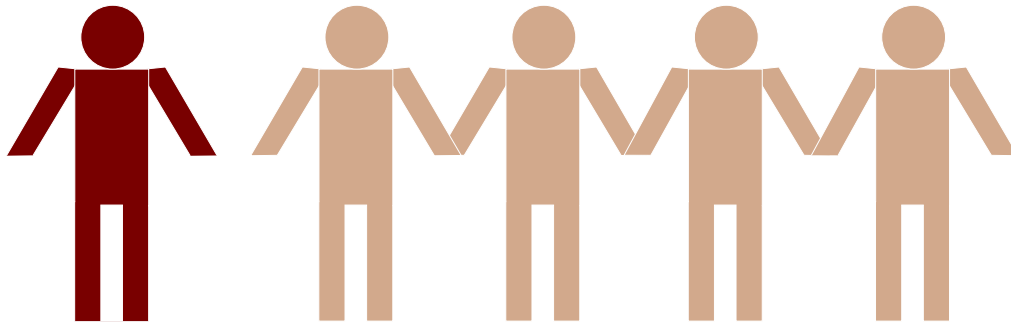
costs, behavioral health prioritization, and other advances are beginning to help close funding gaps.⁶ Moreover, in 2013, nearly one in three AIANs lacked health insurance, despite coverage gains achieved for many Americans through the Affordable Care Act.⁷ Disproportionate poverty and unemployment, low educational attainment rates, inadequate housing, and rural or isolated geographical locations further contribute to coverage gaps and barriers to health care for Native youth and their families.

STRENGTHENING MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH TRADITION AND CULTURE

Studies show that Native youth engage in binge drinking and use substances like marijuana and opioids at higher rates and earlier ages than their non-Native peers.⁸ Over 60 percent of surveyed youth want more resources to address drug and alcohol abuse. Specifically, youth want local tribal treatment and rehabilitation centers that keep those in recovery close to their tribal communities and incorporate traditional healing practices such as sweat lodges, smudging, and other ceremonies. Surveyed youth also value community-based recreational activities that bring tribal youth from around their regions together for fun alternatives to high-risk behaviors. It is important to note that though these community-based health care or prevention services may exist for some communities, barriers such as lack of transportation still present obstacles to youth access to prevention services.⁹

In almost all CNAY youth roundtables, participants discussed the prevalence of depression, self-harm, suicidal ideations, and/or completed suicides among peers. Suicide remains the second-leading cause of death

1 IN 5 AIAN YOUTH ATTEMPTS SUICIDE EACH YEAR



Source: Suicide Prevention Resource Center, *Suicide Among Racial/Ethnic Populations in the U.S.: American Indians/Alaska Natives* (Waltham, MA: Education Development Center, 2013).

among AIAN youth ages 15–24,¹⁰ and one in five AIAN youth attempts suicide each year.¹¹ Youth roundtable participants attribute this epidemic to pervasive negative stereotypes of Native people, prioritization of unattainable lifestyles and standards of beauty on social media, proximity to severe poverty and addiction, loneliness, and isolation, among other factors.

Native youth are leading community initiatives that incorporate culture and peer-to-peer suicide prevention training to address suicide, and studies show that young people are more likely to solicit and receive help from other youth.¹² Research supports what Native youth tell us — that cultural connectedness is a major protective factor against Native youth suicide.¹³ Initiatives like the Sweetgrass and B.E.A.R. programs on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation use cultural teachings to help youth cope with depression and suicide in an area where suicide clusters are tragically common.¹⁴

REBUILDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND GETTING THE COMMUNITY MOVING

During our community conversations, Native youth consistently raise access to healthy

foods — particularly traditional foods — as a major health priority. Recent data suggest that one in four Native households is food insecure,¹⁵ meaning that access to adequate food was limited by a lack of money or other resources at times during any given year.¹⁶ In response, Native youth are

establishing community gardens that provide fresh produce for local schools and families as an effort to reclaim and reinforce food sovereignty — the right of individuals and communities to eat what they choose, rather than having a diet imposed on them.¹⁷ For example, the Crow Creek Fresh Food Initiative partnered with the Boys and Girls Club–Crow Creek Unit to create a youth agricultural leadership program that resulted in the growing, planting, and harvesting of over 350 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables across nearly 30 individual and community garden plots.¹⁸

Access to sport and physical wellness activities is another consistent priority for

“By working together with youth and elders to grow and harvest healthy, traditional foods, we can reduce our dependence on unhealthy alternatives, revitalize cultures, and keep our communities healthy and strong.”

- CALICO DUCHENEAUX, NATIVE YOUTH FROM THE CHEYENNE RIVER SIOUX TRIBE

Native youth across the country. A recent literature review of self-reported data over the last 50 years found that within that period only 26.5 percent of AIAN youth met the recommendation for physical activity based on national and international standards (e.g., 23 to 25 minutes per day).¹⁹ In roundtables, youth said that recreational centers with flexible hours of operation that offer both structured programming and open space for youth-led activities help their efforts to foster active lifestyles and combat obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Safety also remains a challenge as nearly 70 percent of respondents to our survey said they needed safe, public spaces for community events. Youth have also shared with us in surveys and roundtables that they prefer traditional sports like lacrosse, canoeing, and stickball as avenues for physical activity. National organizations like the Notah Begay III Foundation and Nike N7 are working to increase AIAN youth physical activity by funding youth-led, community-based sport initiatives.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE ORAL HEALTH

Of AIAN children, 72 percent have untreated tooth decay by their fifth birthday.²⁰ Untreated, tooth decay can lead to unnecessary pain, difficulty chewing and therefore compromised nutrition, challenges with speaking, and school absences.²¹ Of youth survey respondents, 42 percent say they need better access to oral health care in their community. Since much of Indian Country is situated in remote or rural areas, attracting dentists to IHS positions or other dental practices in Indian communities is difficult.²² Midlevel providers called Dental Health Aide Therapists (DHATs) can be trained in two years to perform a small range of preventative, routine procedures with remote

supervision. These providers have expanded oral health care to more than 40,000 Alaska Natives across 81 rural Alaska communities since 2004.²³ The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians were among the first tribes in the lower 48 states to also adopt DHATs.²⁴

FOSTERING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUAL/ GENDER IDENTITIES

“Healthy relationships and self-care are important to me. I like to use my art work as a centerpiece to get people’s attention and start discussion points on the issues that affect teens.”

- JAYDEN “DUSTIN LEE” WILLIARD-BURKE,
ALASKA NATIVE / YUP’IK YOUTH FROM
THE NATIVE VILLAGE OF KASIGLUK

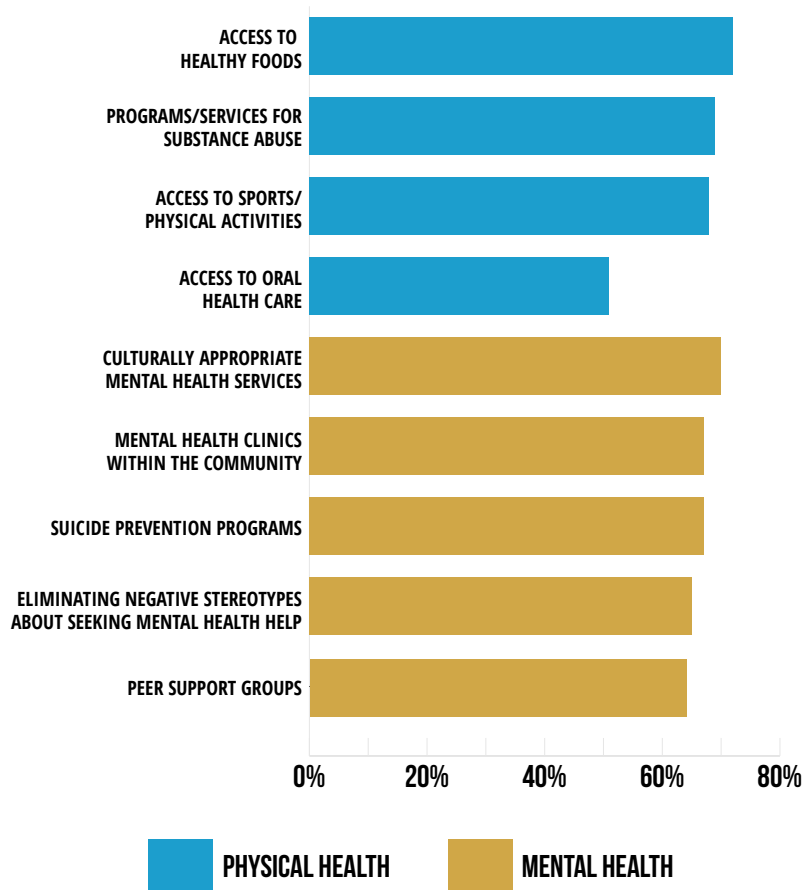
Of respondents to our online survey, 68 percent count teen pregnancy prevention, support for young parents, and education about sexually transmitted illnesses within their top five sexual health priorities. Youth who participated in our roundtable discussions say that peers are engaging in sexual activity at younger ages, and that sex is often not discussed between youth and adults. Consistently improving teen birth rates are the norm among most other communities, but for Native communities this remains a challenge. Research shows that Native teens are more likely than other teens to have sex before age 16, and 21 percent of Native girls will become mothers before age 20, compared

to 16 percent nationwide.²⁵ Youth are drawn to peer advice and support programs as safe, confidential spaces to explore these issues. Programs like We R Native²⁶ from the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network²⁷ engage youth in online platforms to express themselves through both word and art, find resources, and exchange peer advice around sexual health.

Tackling the epidemic of domestic and dating violence and sexual assault is another key priority for Native youth. Of youth survey respondents, 71 percent reported a need for programs and services that address victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault. Research shows that more than half of AIAN

women and more than one in four AIAN men have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.²⁸ Native youth roundtable participants say that breaking the silence around sexual assault with peers, family, and elders is foremost for both healing and prevention. The 2013 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act restored jurisdiction to tribal courts to prosecute non-Native perpetrators of domestic violence on Indian lands, a vital tool for local tribal prosecutors to combat this issue.²⁹ Youth from the Wise Women Gathering Place in Green Bay, Wisconsin, use the Discovery Dating curriculum, a healthy relationship toolkit aimed to end abuse, improve relationships, and educate peers about sexual consent, dating violence, and more.³⁰

HEALTH RESOURCES NEEDED According to Native Youth



Over half of youth survey respondents reported a specific need for programs for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, **Two Spirit**, and asexual (LGBTQ+TSA+) youth. This October, The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) created its first-ever Two Spirit and LGBTQ task force, following a 2015 resolution in support of the Two Spirit community, which advocated for anti-discrimination protections and support platform.³¹ The resolution reported that 65 percent of transgender and gender nonconforming AIAN people face harassment, with 10 and 14 percent experiencing sexual and physical assault, respectively.³² Though some tribal communities are becoming more inclusive of Two Spirit individuals, in light of these statistics, some Native youth in roundtable discussions say there is a need for more basic education about sexual

Source: Center for Native American Youth, "Generation Indigenous Online Roundtable Survey" (survey, Center for Native American Youth, Washington, D.C., 2016)

and gender identity fluidity and resources for supportive community members. NCAI's Policy Research Center released a demographic profile on the Native Two Spirit community that suggests that cultural rootedness helps offset the psychological effects of discrimination that Native LGBTQTSA+ sometimes face.³³ Resources like the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, Native Out, and WeRNative provide online resource directories and support systems for LGBTQTSA+ Native youth.



Left to right: 2015 Center for Native American Youth Champions for Change Jazmyn Espinoza (Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohican Indians), Carin Young (Native Hawaiian), and Tatiana Ticknor (Yup'ik, Tlingit, Dena'ina), speaking at a panel event at The Aspen Institute. Jazmyn and Carin both started initiatives to create safe spaces and networks to promote healing among Native youth.

CULTURE'S ROLE IN HEALTH & WELLNESS

Across all the communities we visit, good health is rooted in strong culture. Though scarcity of primary and mental health care providers, barriers to transportation, and lack of access to healthy foods and physical activity remain challenges, Native youth are finding innovative ways to capitalize on the protective strengths of their rich cultures to

address the needs of their peers, families, and entire communities. As tribal leaders and other policymakers examine solutions to many of these challenges, they should create seats at the table for Native youth. Though these challenges can seem daunting, Native youth are starting programs and initiatives and supporting other advocates in their communities to turn the tide on intergenerational trauma and poor health.

SPOTLIGHT: INDIGENOUS FOOD & AGRICULTURE INITIATIVE


The Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative uses intertribal collaboration and enhanced leadership development to provide youth opportunities to study legal issues, food and agriculture policy, explore career opportunities, and brainstorm potential solutions and actions that improve food insecurity and healthy food access in their home communities.

For more information, visit www.indigenousfoodandag.com.

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A photograph showing a group of people at a formal event. In the foreground, a Native American youth is seen from the back, wearing a traditional yellow feathered headdress. Next to them, a woman with long dark hair (Marilyn Fox) and an older man with glasses in a dark suit (US Sen Byron L. Dorgan) are looking towards the right. The background is filled with other attendees in a large, ornate hall with flags.

Native youth, Marilyn Fox (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe) with
CNAY Founder and Chairman, US Sen Byron L. Dorgan (ret.)
at the 2014 White House Tribal Nations Conference.

CHAPTER TWO

SYSTEMS INVOLVING YOUTH

Traditionally, tribes had strong systems of support in place as part of their culture — systems that helped rehabilitate youth and families and keep the whole community healthy. Today, Native American youth are involved with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems — sometimes simultaneously — at alarmingly high rates. They are incarcerated at nearly four times the rate of their white peers¹ and are placed in foster care at more than 1.6 times the expected level when compared with their population size.² Placement in these systems results in a number of obstacles for Native youth, but one of the most harmful is the loss of connection with their culture. Having strong tribal identities, residing with or near family and tribal members, and practicing cultural traditions provide critical supports for youth. A recent study demonstrates that cultural identity has a strong correlation to positive behaviors within tribal communities.³

For Native youth, their experience of the juvenile justice and child welfare systems is intertwined and complex. When these systems intervene in the lives of youth and their families, the youth are often effectively cut off from much-needed support systems and protective factors. In the juvenile justice system, that separation occurs when youth are sent to out-of-state facilities far from their homelands and families. Compared with their white peers, Native youth in the juvenile justice system are 1.5 times more likely to receive out-of-home placement.⁴ In the child welfare system, separation is due to the placement of Native children in non-Native foster homes and can be permanent via private adoptions. Youth from CNAY's community roundtable conversations

expressed how the separation from their cultures and families leads to identity issues and lack of self-esteem, which can lead to damaging, self-destructive behaviors, among other negative outcomes.

CHILD WELFARE: STRENGTHENING ICWA AND RESPECTING CULTURE & FAMILIES

Culture has always been at the center of strong child and family welfare in our communities. Lack of respect for culture and its role in our family systems is at the heart of many of the policy failures of the past in tribal child welfare. Youth consistently express the importance of recognizing differences in child rearing and familial roles between Native and non-Native communities, which have historically been viewed negatively by nontribal child welfare systems and led to children being removed for reasons of neglect. Tribal communities often have elders and other extended family members playing prominent roles in raising young children, which can differ from Western family structures.

“The Indian Child Welfare Act is important because it not only keeps Native children safe, it also allows them to stay within their own communities and cultures, where they can practice their ceremonies and speak their languages.”

**- VANESSA GOODTHUNDER, LOWER
SIOUX INDIAN COMMUNITY, 2016 CNAY
CHAMPION FOR CHANGE**

Since 2009, Native children have had the highest rates of representation in foster care compared with other races and ethnicities.⁵ Native youth have expressed the need to strengthen the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) to prevent the disproportionate removal of Native children from their homes and tribal cultures.⁶ After decades of Native children being removed from their homes and cultures, ICWA was passed to “protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes.”⁷ Although ICWA was passed in 1978, state courts and state agencies have inconsistently applied the law, resulting in high removal rates in some states like Washington, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Alaska.⁸ For example, a 2007 report showed that while Native children made up 20 percent of Alaska’s child population, nearly 50 percent of children in foster care were Native.⁹

A new rule promulgated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 2016 aims to ensure consistent implementation of ICWA to promote greater stability for Indian children,

their families, and tribal communities. Under the new rule, state courts in foster care, termination of parental rights, and adoption proceedings will be required to ask whether the child is an “Indian child” under ICWA.¹⁰ This would increase the likelihood of placing a child with extended family and other ICWA-preferred placements, ultimately promoting cultural stability for the child and healthy connections with his or her family and tribal culture.

JUVENILE JUSTICE: FIXING A BROKEN SYSTEM THROUGH SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMS

The juvenile justice system is another serious impediment to Native youth success. For example, Native girls have the highest rates of incarceration of any ethnic group and are nearly five times more likely than white girls to be confined to a juvenile detention facility.¹² Depending on where — on or off tribal land — youth enter the system, they can also end up tangled in a web of federal,

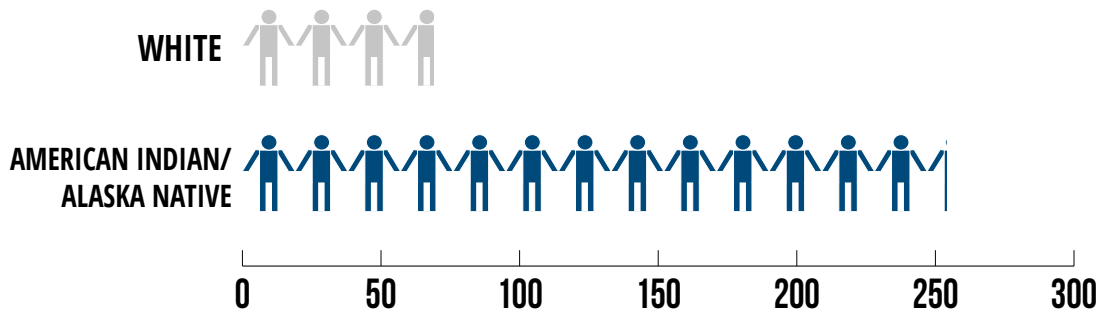
SPOTLIGHT: ONEIDA TRIBE OF WISCONSIN

The Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin’s Children and Family Services Department aims to provide services necessary to meet the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual well-being needs of children, youth, and families through a variety of programs. Under ICWA, in 1992 the tribe created the Oneida Nation Foster Care Program, which is a state-licensed, tribally operated placement agency designed to facilitate out-of-home placements for Oneida children only when no family is available. The program recruits, licenses, trains, and supports Native American foster homes and the Oneida children within those homes. The tribe offers three parenting programs, the Oneida Nation Active Fathers Program, the Oneida Nation Parenting Class, and the Oneida Teen Parent Support Group.²²

For more information, visit www.oneida-nsn.gov/resources/child-family-services.

YOUTH INCARCERATION RATES

Per 100,000 Youth (2013)



Source: The W. Haywood Burns Institute, "Stemming the Rising Tide: Racial & Ethnic Disparities in Youth Incarceration & Strategies for Change" (The W. Haywood Institute, Oakland, California, 2016). http://www.burnsinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Stemming-the-Rising-Tide_FINAL.pdf.

state, local, and tribal jurisdictions. According to an Indian Law and Order Commission's (ILOC) 2013 report, the juvenile justice system in Indian Country "is even more disturbingly broken than its adult counterpart."¹³ It requires several substantial changes, including greater cooperation between child welfare and juvenile justice systems, increased funding for tribally operated facilities and programs, and addressing the lack of education and culture within juvenile facilities.¹⁴

Attaining quality education is a struggle for Native youth in general, but for youth involved in the juvenile criminal justice system, getting an education can be even more challenging. Youth who commit misdemeanors on tribal lands may be placed in federal juvenile detention facilities run by the Office of Justice Services, which rarely offer educational services, often resulting in serious interruptions to their education and chances for completion.¹⁵ According to the ILOC report, "Congress has not appropriated any Federal funds for [education] in recent years. This means that Native children behind bars are not receiving any classroom

teaching or other educational instruction or services at all."¹⁶ Sixty percent of surveyed youth feel strongly about access to a quality education which they believe should extend to those who are incarcerated as well.¹⁷

Another issue within the

juvenile justice system is the lack of cultural and trauma-based supports, which can ultimately disconnect youth from their tribes and increase the trauma they experience. If Native youth commit crimes outside of tribal lands, they are placed in state and county jails and prisons, where there is generally no requirement for law enforcement to contact and inform the youth's tribe.¹⁸ These facilities are sometimes long distances from tribal communities and, like federal facilities, rarely offer culturally based, and supportive programs for Native youth. Such facilities often focus on punishment, rather than rehabilitation, and utilize practices like solitary confinement that ultimately re-traumatize already severely traumatized youth.¹⁹ Native youth regularly highlight the need for trauma-informed care and interventions, which are systems and structures that understand, recognize, and respond to the effects of all types of trauma, especially in juvenile justice facilities, to support positive rehabilitation and re-entry for their peers.²⁰

“Maintaining a cultural connection for youth who are in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems is necessary for the development and growth of those young people. Their culture provides an invaluable source of identity, strength, and self-worth. Therefore, it is incredibly important for those systems to include culturally-appropriate programming and resources, as well as ongoing connections to their home communities.”

- RORY TAYLOR, PAWNEE NATION OF OKLAHOMA, 2015 CNAY CHAMPION FOR CHANGE

CULTURE'S ROLE IN CHILD WELFARE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE

Although significant challenges still face youth in the child welfare and juvenile systems, active efforts are underway to improve those systems to increase the likelihood of Native youth success. For example, the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act, which was recently signed into law, will study structures and programs, including the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, that impact Native youth, and provide recommendations for their improvement.²¹ Efforts like these, building off of those like ILOC that have come before, will ultimately provide advocates and policymakers with the information needed to make necessary improvements to the child welfare and juvenile systems, and ultimately prevent Native youth from entering them at all.

SPOTLIGHT: ROSEBUD SIOUX TRIBE & THE OJJDP'S YOUTH GREEN REENTRY PROGRAM

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe incorporates culture during incarceration and re-entry to ensure that Native youth are successfully rehabilitated.²³ This program is operated through funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Youth Green Reentry Program.²⁴ While in detention, youth work hand in hand with traditional elders to address their behavioral and health issues. The re-entry program incorporates green technologies such as gardening, beekeeping, raising chickens, recycling, and environmental education. The tribe also utilizes traditional practices and healing ceremonies, including sweat lodge and pipe ceremonies, for Native youth who are re-entering the community. Similar programs that have received funding through OJJDP's Youth Green Reentry Program have been found to lower short-term recidivism and drug/alcohol use among participants as well as improve school and community engagement and future planning.²⁵

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Gen-I Youth Ambassador Bobby “Trae” Trousdale (Citizen Potawatomi Nation) networking with other Native youth at the 2016 White House Tribal Youth Gathering. As a Gen-I Ambassador, Trae worked with his youth council to establish a mentorship program.

CHAPTER THREE

Education & Jobs

In order to support successful learning and career readiness for Native youth, history matters.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, entire generations of Native children were removed from their homes to attend boarding schools. These schools forced Native children to convert to Christianity and speak English, and forbade the practice of their cultural traditions and the use of their Native languages.¹ Sexual, physical, and emotional abuse in these schools were rampant and thousands of Native children died due to beatings from violence, medical neglect, and malnutrition.² This formal policy of the U.S. government, known as “kill the Indian, save the man,” laid the foundation for many of the disparities that Native youth in U.S. education systems and the job force experience today.³ Today, Native youth are at the leading edge of healing their communities from this historical trauma — drawing strength from their culture to help rebuild their language programs, connect traditional arts with improved learning outcomes, and provide intergenerational opportunities for elders in the classroom. Though the obstacles to a quality education and jobs are significant for Native youth, their communities and cultures can be a tremendous resource.

“With the power of an education, young Indigenous leaders in tribal communities and all over Indian Country will grow to learn and stand up for who they are as they continue to make their change on our world.”

- SHASTA DAZEN, NATIVE YOUTH FROM THE WHITE MOUNTAIN APACHE TRIBE

IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

The trauma manifested by the boarding school and adoption eras has real and serious implications for educational attainment and the school climate for Native youth today.⁴ Studies have shown that the trauma experienced by those who were ripped from their families and forced into boarding schools and into adoptions can influence and perpetuate traumatic experiences across generations.⁵ This historical trauma has been shown to cause many of the disparities in the health and well-being of future generations as well as in educational outcomes.⁶

As a result, Native students attain significantly lower standardized test scores than students of other racial backgrounds, achieving “proficient” or “advanced” levels at just half the rate of their non-Native peers.⁷ This year, Native students graduated from high school at a rate of 71 percent, the lowest of any racial or ethnic group in the US.⁸ Yet, these rates continue to improve every year, having increased nearly 7 percent over the past five years.⁹

According to our online survey, 50 percent of Native youth say that these education gaps can be overcome by improving school climate, addressing racial equity, and increasing access to resources such as enhanced standardized test preparation and after-school tutoring services. Youth also highlighted the importance of including more culturally competent lessons into the school curriculum. An example of a successful youth-led organization that helps improve these educational outcomes is Native Education Raising Dedicated Students (NERDS).¹ NERDS is a student-run organization that provides Native students with peer-to-peer mentoring, cultural support services, and scholarship and

internship opportunities.¹¹ Participants in the cultural program have improved academic ability and performance, improved self-esteem, and an increased interest in attending higher education institutions.¹²

INCREASING HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

A Georgetown University report predicts that by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the US economy will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school.¹³ This is an obstacle for the Native American population, as only 2 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives are enrolled in degree-granting institutions, and only 13 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 32

percent of the overall population.¹⁴ These gaps perpetuate a long-standing cycle that results in a high unemployment rate that is estimated to reach 24 percent for AIAN youth and 17 percent for all AIAN people.¹⁵ Due to isolated geographic locations and local economies that struggle with access to capital and other challenges, more AIAN live in poverty than any other racial or ethnic group, with 23 percent of Natives living below the poverty line. As a result, without scholarships or other forms of significant financial aid, many Native youth bear the overwhelming burden of paying for a higher education on their own.

Over 70 percent of surveyed Native youth want help finding and applying for scholarships, internships, and fellowships. Many tribes, like the Cherokee Nation in its Directed Studies program, have identified this need and offer grants and scholarships to help support higher education. In addition, the Cherokee Nation requires that program participants sign a contract to work for the tribe for at least two years after graduation, thereby securing job opportunities for tribal citizens and ensuring a return on its investment for the community.¹⁶

IMPROVING OPPORTUNITY THROUGH FEDERAL POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS

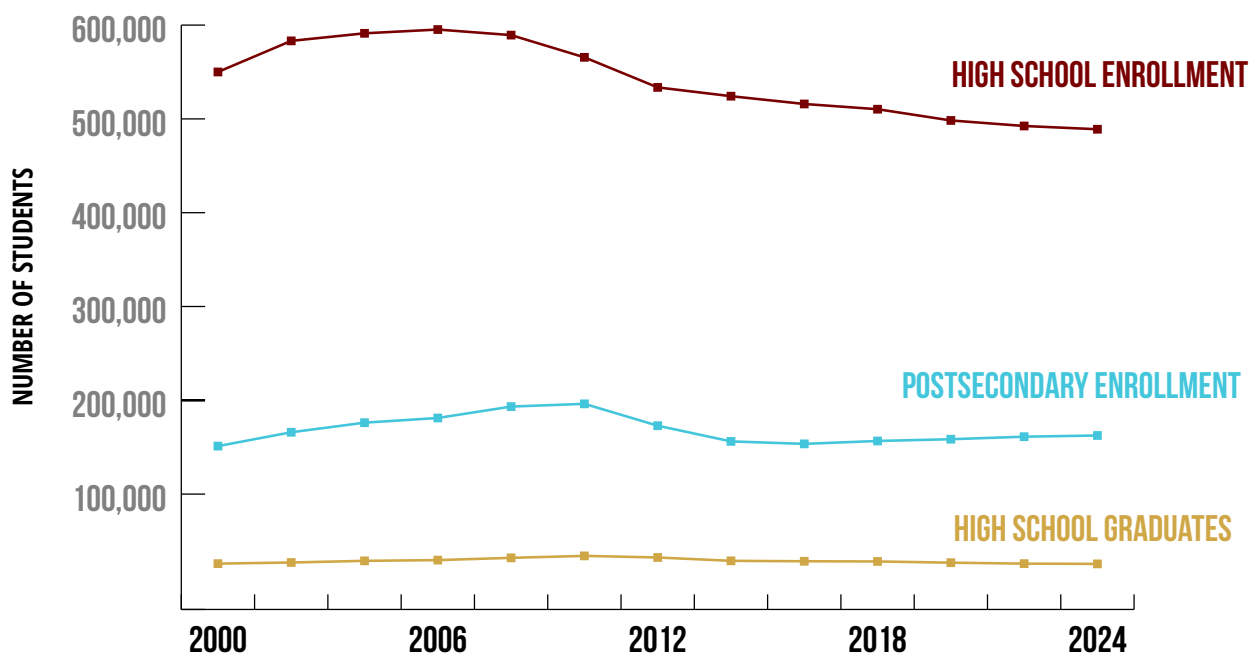
The federal government is also taking important steps toward improving Native educational outcomes. Last year, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law, which includes key provisions

2013 CNAY Champion for Change Dahkota Brown (Wilton Miwok) founded NERDS - Native Education Raising Dedicated Students - to help fellow Native students do well in school and encourage them to continue with their education.



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF AMERICAN INDIANS/ALASKA NATIVES

Actual and Projected Numbers from 2000-2024



Sources: Alia Wong, "The Subtle Evolution of Native American Education," *The Atlantic*, September 1, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/09/native-american-education/402787/>; Snyder, T.D., de Brey, C., and Dillow, S.A. (2016). *Digest of Education Statistics 2014* (NCES 2016-006). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/digest/2014menu_tables.asp

that improve Native education.¹⁷ This new law promises unprecedented opportunities and funding for tribes and schools to improve Native education. First, Bureau of Indian Education schools are now eligible to apply for funding that was previously available only to public schools.¹⁸ Second, the ESSA removes strict definitions and requirements for teachers so that public schools can better leverage the wisdom and knowledge of tribal elders as teachers without requiring them to go through the difficult teacher certification processes.¹⁹ Last, the law appropriates new **Title VII** funding to be used to fund Native language immersion programs in public schools.²⁰

Safe and welcoming learning environments are also critical to the success of Native youth in school. Nearly 64 percent of Native youth in our survey highlighted the need to improve school climate by removing racist mascots

"Our languages and our ceremonies are important to us. We want to be able to keep our traditions and our culture alive"

- KYLA SMOKE, NATIVE YOUTH FROM THE ONONDAGA NATION

and other stereotypes, and by addressing institutional racism and bullying. Recognizing these issues, in 2014 the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education (WHIAIANE) launched a national listening session in which officials visited seven states and heard from 1,000 participants. Last year, WHIAIANE published a report of its findings and recommendations and is continuing to develop new resources to

support students, educators, and support staff in building more culturally inclusive learning environments.²¹

CULTURE'S ROLE IN EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

Policy successes like the ESSA represent a new and important era in education for Native people — one built on tribal control and preservation of culture. Given the right tools in schools, Native youth can be extraordinary partners in ensuring the success of these policies because they understand the importance of their roles when it comes to preserving language and culture. Research shows that AIAN youth thrive in educational environments that honor their cultures and

languages.²² As a new administration takes office, we hope it will not only keep the last administration's commitment to Native youth but build on the successes of these kinds of educational policies. The most important way policymakers can understand how to improve outcomes for Native youth is to ask Native youth themselves. By listening directly to Native youth about their experiences in the classroom, we can continue to pursue culturally relevant strategies that will improve their success.

SPOTLIGHT: COOK INLET TRIBAL COUNCIL

The Cook Inlet Tribal Council, in partnership with the Anchorage School District, coordinates various programs, including Journey Ahead, a college and career readiness program that serves AIAN students in Anchorage. These programs include academic tutoring, camps during school breaks, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics learning labs. The program has seen an increase in graduation rates, with more than 90 percent of participants completing high school.²³


For more information, visit www.citci.org.



(Photos courtesy of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council)

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A photograph of a young man, Rory Taylor, standing at a dark grey podium. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a red tie. He has several medals and ribbons around his neck. He is looking to his right. Behind him are three flags: the United States flag on the left, the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma flag in the center, and a black flag with a white graphic on the right. The background is a dark blue curtain.

2015 CNAY Champion for Change Rory Taylor (Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma) addressing delegates at the 2015 White House Tribal Nations Conference.

CHAPTER FOUR

SACRED SITES, LANDS, AND WATERWAYS

In 2016, we witnessed the largest gathering of tribal nations in over a hundred years: the protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), an oil pipeline approved for construction across sacred sites and a portion of the Missouri River bordering the Standing Rock Sioux reservation.¹ Native youth were a driving force behind the movement to block its construction. During the summer, a group of Native youth from the Standing Rock reservation ran 2,000 miles to deliver a petition to the Army Corps of Engineers in Washington, DC, to stop construction.² Since then, thousands of people have organized at a camp near Standing Rock in protest of the construction of the pipeline due to the threat it poses to sacred sites and their water supply. The historic gathering to protest the DAPL is a testament to the courage of tribal nations and youth to preserve their land and culture.

Respondents to the Gen-I survey ranked environmental and land protection issues as one of the top 10 priorities of Native youth, with nearly 80 percent of respondents expressing strong interest in involvement in efforts to protect traditional resources and lands. While the federal government has a legal obligation and duty to protect Native lands and **sacred sites**, the process often fails tribes, as it did with DAPL. The effects of global climate change have further disrupted traditional ecological systems, severely diminishing access to vital resources and compromising health, age-old cultural practices, and subsistence lifestyles. These are the reasons Native youth are standing with Standing Rock and all the other tribes working to protect their lands, waterways, and sacred sites.

PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES & TRADITIONAL WAYS OF LIFE

Pollution and climate change have disproportionate impacts on tribal communities due to tribes' intimate relationship with the lands they inhabit.³ In Alaska, flooding from melting polar ice caps and rising ocean temperatures have forced villages like Newtok, a settlement of the Yupi'k people, to relocate and abandon their fields, hunting grounds, and ancestral homelands, leaving behind their traditional way of life.⁴ Alaska is not alone in facing these extreme environmental changes — the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw tribe in Louisiana became some of the first "climate refugees" in the US after being granted federal aid to resettle in more livable areas.⁵

While indigenous people are increasingly at risk from the impact of climate change, they have the most to offer to combat its effects, particularly because of their **Traditional Ecological Knowledge** (TEK).⁶ In fact, the South Central Climate Science Center has a research partnership with the Choctaw

"We are committed to deepening our connections with our cultures as they relate to climate change and the impacts on community and environmental health, because we know too well that what is done to the land is done to the people, and right now both are threatened."

**- SAM SLATER, NAVAJO NATION,
2016 CNAY CHAMPION FOR CHANGE**

IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON TRIBAL COMMUNITIES



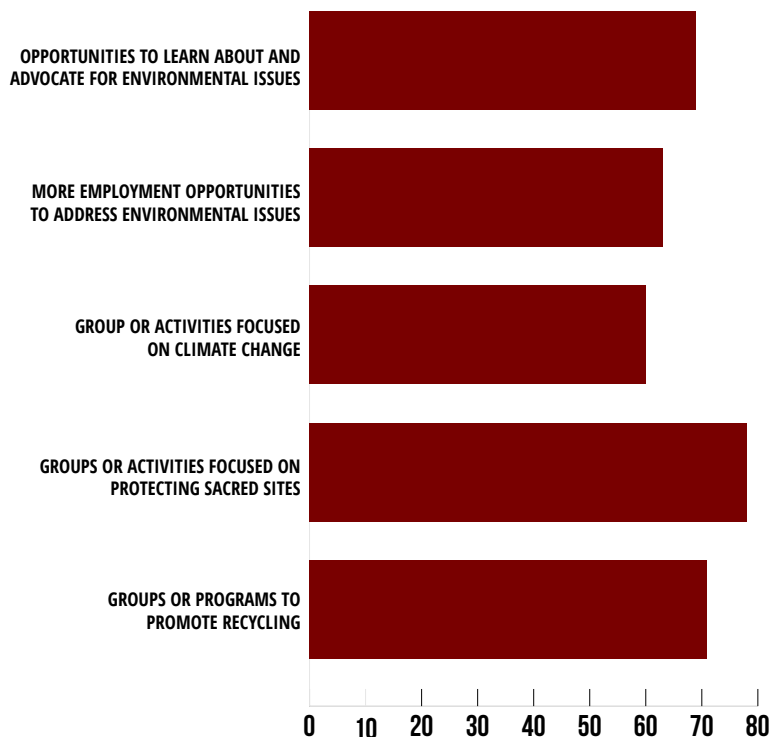
Tribal lands indicated in pink. Map source: www.nationalatlas.gov.

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and Chickasaw Nations to help the tribes develop long-term strategies to cope with environmental changes.⁷ Additionally, the Inter-Tribal Youth Climate Leadership Congress convenes over 100 Native youth each year to raise environmental awareness in tribal communities; to teach youth to reduce their carbon footprints through recycling, composting, and renewable energy initiatives; and to strengthen youth-led efforts to protect natural resources through TEK.⁸ At the local level, youth like Stephen Karol, a Gen-I ambassador from the Tuscarora Tribe and a member of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, started his school's first "Garden Club" to cultivate its own community garden and petition the school to practice more energy-efficient and environmentally aware practices.

RESOURCES NEEDED TO ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

According to Native Youth



Source: Center for Native American Youth, "Generation Indigenous Online Roundtable Survey" (survey, Center for Native American Youth, Washington, D.C., 2016).

"We as indigenous people have a connection to the earth and to the creator. I stand by my family in ceremonies to protect this land we call home. A tree cannot grow without its roots — without our foundation, who are we?"

- NAELYN PIKE, NATIVE YOUTH
FROM THE SAN CARLOS APACHE NATION

PROTECTING SACRED SITES FROM EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES

In the early 19th century, the federal government promoted a wide range of programs and policies with the purpose of disconnecting Native Americans from their cultural practices and identities, including removing them from their sacred lands.⁹ It wasn't until 1978 that the American Indian Religious Freedom Act¹⁰ and, later, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 were signed into law, declaring that tribal nations have the legal right to protect their cultural items and funerary objects, practice traditional religions, and enforce tribal sovereignty.¹¹ However, the protection of and a tribe's access to their sacred places are still being threatened due to the lack of a comprehensive federal policy preserving these sites.¹²

Oak Flat, a sacred site for the San Carlos Apache Nation in Arizona, has been a highly contested area between the tribe it belongs to and the federal government. In 2014, Congress passed



Photo taken at the protest camp outside the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Reservation during CNAY Executive Director Erik Stegman's visit. Read his blog post, "The Story Behind Standing Rock," at www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/story-behind-standing-rock-dakota-access-pipeline.

a bill that included the Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation Act, which allowed the development of an underground mine by a foreign company through Oak Flat and Apache Leap, another sacred site to the San Carlos Apache people.¹³ In response, Native youth involved with grassroots organizations like Apache Stronghold¹⁴ are advocating to defend sacred sites, attending government hearings on sacred sites and raising awareness of the unjust desecration of sacred sites.

For Native youth, cultural survival is critical.¹⁵ This is why large numbers of Native youth are involved in protecting their ancestral lands and natural resources — it's an effort to preserve their culture and identity.

Organizations like Apache Stronghold, Alaska Youth for Environmental Action,¹⁶ and Earth Guardians¹⁷ are inspiring action on environmental issues, and creating platforms for young Native American leaders to advocate for protecting land and sacred sites from oil drilling, hydraulic fracking, contaminating drinking water, and other harmful effects of development.

CULTURE'S ROLE IN PROTECTING THE LAND & ENVIRONMENT

As a result of recent land protection efforts, including the Dakota Access Pipeline and Oak Flat, among others, policymakers and environmentalists are advocating for the

federal government to uphold moral, political, and legal trust responsibilities to tribes by protecting tribal interests when considering federally permitted projects. Federal agencies like the US Department of the Interior are updating frameworks and promoting agency collaboration to help address environmental issues with tribes.

Through a secretarial order from the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and other agencies are encouraged to practice cooperative management of

public lands with tribal communities.¹⁸

Native youth across the country seek this same spirit of cooperation and collaboration in all decisions that affect tribal lands and sacred sites. What happens at Standing Rock will have major implications, and youth are

paying particularly close attention. Standing Rock has become a symbol that represents the many other fights and struggles like it across the country.

“This kind of collaboration with tribal nations will help ensure that we’re appropriately and genuinely integrating indigenous expertise, experience and perspectives into the management of public lands”

- SALLY JEWELL, U.S. SECRETARY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

SPOTLIGHT: VIOLENCE ON THE LAND, VIOLENCE ON OUR BODIES

Community livelihood and cultural preservation are not the only areas impacted by environmental degradation. Individual health is also being harmed. The Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies initiative by the Women’s Earth Alliance and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network seeks to create a collaborative indigenous response to extractive industries such as chemical manufacturing and waste dumping on tribal lands and their effects on sexual and reproductive health. This year, the initiative developed a toolkit to help communities educate members of the relationships among the environment, gender-based violence, and health, and reinvigorate indigenous health practices using natural resources.

For more information, visit www.landbodydefense.org.

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APPENDIX

GLOSSARY

ABOUT THE GENERATION INDIGENOUS
ONLINE ROUNDTABLE SURVEY

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH

GLOSSARY

American Indian (AI)/Alaska Native (AN),

as used in the United States Census is a person “having origins in any original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition.”¹ This term is often used in reference to collected data about the population.

Food Sovereignty refers to the right of a community, in this case a tribal community, to reclaim its local food-system control, revitalize traditional land management practices, and uphold cultural continuity through traditional diets.²

Indian Country legally refers to “(a) all land within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States Government, notwithstanding the issuance of any patent, and, including rights-of-way running through the reservation, (b) all dependent Indian communities within the borders of the United States whether within the original or subsequently acquired territory thereof, and whether within or without the limits of a state, and (c) all Indian allotments, the Indian titles to which have not been extinguished, including rights-of-way running through the same.”³

Native American refers to “all Native peoples of the United States and its trust territories” — this includes American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Chamorros, American Samoans, and US residents from Canada First Nations and indigenous communities in Central and South America.⁴ For the purposes of CNAY, Native American refers to any self-identifying individual of indigenous ancestry in the Americas.

Sacred Site refers to “any specific, discrete, narrowly delineated location on Federal land that is identified by an Indian tribe, or Indian individual determined to be an appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion, as sacred by virtue of its established religious significance to, or ceremonial use by, an Indian religion; provided that the tribe or appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion has informed the agency of the existence of such a site.”⁵

Seventh Generation is a philosophy/concept of sustainability credited to of the Iroquois Confederacy. It has common reference among many Native American tribes. According to this philosophy, the current generation is the product of decisions and actions by tribal elders in the past. At the same time, it also urges the current generation to act for the benefit of descendants seven generations into the future.

Title VII – Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reforms Indian education program by meeting “the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students”. The policy provides direct assistance for “(1) meeting the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives; (2) the education of Indian children and adults; (3) the training of Indian persons as educators and counselors, and in other professions serving Indian people; and (4) research, evaluation, data collection, and technical assistance.”⁶

Traditional Ecological Knowledge refers to “the knowledge held by indigenous cultures about their immediate environment and the cultural practices that build on that knowledge. Traditional ecological knowledge includes an intimate and detailed knowledge of plants, animals, and natural phenomena, the development and use of appropriate technologies for hunting, fishing, trapping, agriculture, and forestry, and a holistic knowledge, or “world view” which parallels the scientific discipline of ecology”.⁷

Tribe, otherwise called a “federally recognized (Indian) Tribe”, refers to any American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entity with a government-to-government relationship with the US that is entitled to federal trust obligations.⁸ There are currently 567 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Each tribe is distinct, with its own culture, traditions, language, and community.

For more information on Tribal Nations, read Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction from the National Congress of American Indians <https://view.publitas.com/ncai/tribal-nations-and-the-united-states-an-introduction/>

Two Spirit refers to “a male-bodied or female-bodied person with a masculine or feminine essence. Two Spirits can cross social gender roles, gender expression, and sexual orientation”.⁹ This identity is not specific to one tribe or tribal culture and is claimed by a wide range of Native people across tribes and cultures.

Youth refers to people under the age of 25 years.

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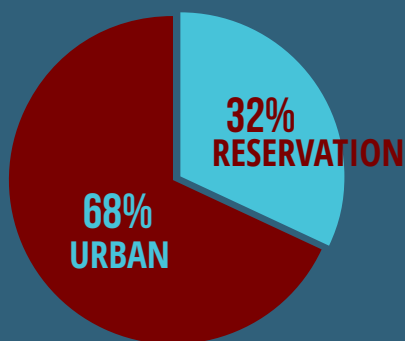
ABOUT THE GENERATION INDIGENOUS ONLINE ROUNDTABLE SURVEY

Each year, CNAY hosts meetings and roundtables with Native youth and service providers in tribal communities across the country to listen to their current challenges, learn about programs that are making a difference, and to better understand the priorities that matter to Native youth. This is one of the most important ways we ensure that Native youth drive our work. We have conducted over 167 roundtables in 24 states with youths representing over 260 tribes. In an effort to hear from even more youth this year, we launched

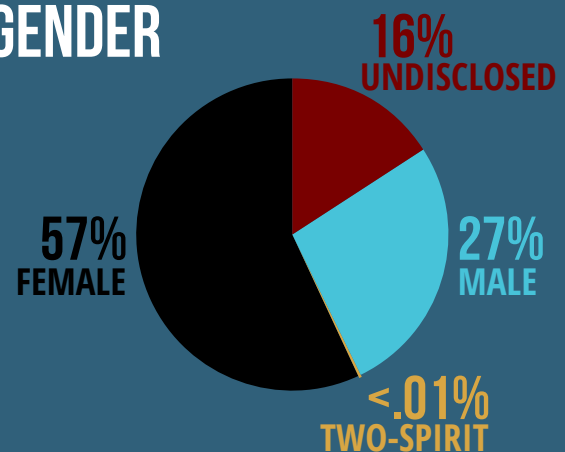
a first-of-its-kind online survey in 2015 as part of Generation Indigenous. Building off our community roundtable model, this survey asked Native youth across the country about the kinds of resources they need and the priorities they care about.

We received over **630 responses** from Native youth across the United States. Below is a summary of our respondents:

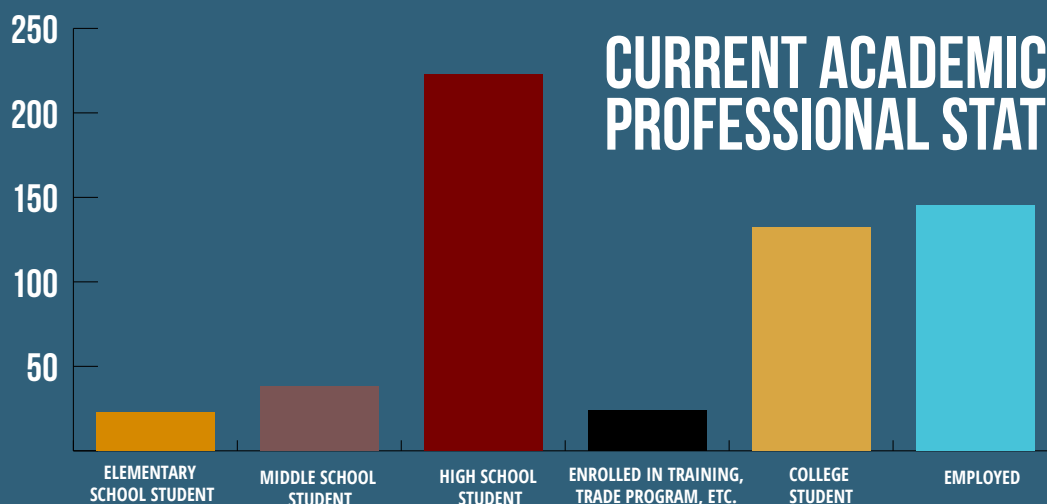
LOCATION



GENDER



CURRENT ACADEMIC OR PROFESSIONAL STATUS



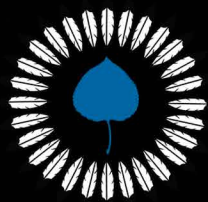
- ABOUT US -

THE CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH

The Center for Native American Youth believes all Native American youth should lead full and healthy lives, have equal access to opportunity, and draw strength from their culture and one another. As a policy program of the Aspen Institute founded by former US Senator Byron Dorgan (ret.), we work to improve the health, safety, and overall well-being of Native American youth. We do this through youth recognition, inspiration and leadership; research, advocacy, and policy change; serving as a national resource exchange; and by building a Native-youth driven narrative.

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute has campuses in Aspen, Colorado, and on the Wye River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It also maintains offices in New York City and has an international network of partners.



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