

# Native Youth Count



CENTER FOR NATIVE  
AMERICAN YOUTH  
AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



2019 STATE OF NATIVE YOUTH REPORT

# Native Youth Count

NOVEMBER 2019

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# 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 inspire one another. As a policy program of the Aspen Institute founded by former U.S. 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; by serving as a national resource exchange; and by connecting Native youth with strengths-based media opportunities.

## GENERATION INDIGENOUS

Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) was launched by President Obama in 2014 as an initiative and call to action to improve the lives of Native youth by removing barriers to opportunity and providing platforms for advocacy.

The Center for Native American Youth leads the Gen-I National Native Youth Network, a platform to connect, engage, and provide opportunities for Native youth. The Network provides leadership development opportunities, a national resource exchange, professional network-building, and opportunities for community action. It also provides a platform to elevate Native youth voices into the national dialogue. To join the Network, youth the ages of 24 and under take the Gen-I Challenge, a pledge to create positive change in their community. Those ages 14-24 who complete the Challenge may elect to become Gen-I Native Youth Ambassadors. These Ambassadors serve as community representatives for the values, resources, and partnerships that are the foundation of the Gen-I initiative.

## THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, D.C. 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.



## ABOUT THE ARTIST: Elizabeth Morgan, Kiowa and Apache

My work is my life on canvas. Stories pass down orally. I wanted to show my culture and my people through my point of view. Telling a story through traditional methods. This is a way that connects me to my nation, my homeland, and identity. Using vibrant colors, the bold outlines help bring life to those stories I heard as a child. Being a young woman now I want to pass that to the youth that will one day be in my footsteps. So they can keep those traditions alive.

## ABOUT THE ART

This piece I named "Sisterhood" where they are wearing cloth dresses and an apron. Both sisters are facing each other. They speak of love, life, and good words. It shows their sisterly bond. Unmarried as shown by their unbound hair. This piece is a connection between past and present. That close sibling relationship. When you go to powwows and ceremonies. Growing up on those traditions you were raised with. Having that sense of belonging and self-awareness in where you come from. Knowing those songs, way of dress, culture and language.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Sam Schimmel

SIBERIAN YUPIK/ KENAITZE INDIAN. CNAY YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER

**T**here are fifteen Alaska Native youth who did not survive Carlisle Indian School and still have not made it back to Alaska. Our elders have been and continue to work to return them home.

In elementary school, I was told to go back to my village. I was told I would never go to college. It didn't stop there. I heard the same message in middle school and in high school. Teachers and school administrators didn't just try to instill in me that I could not succeed but they expected me to fail. I am very well aware that I am not isolated in this story. This is a theme that runs through the lives of Alaska Native and American Indian youth nationwide. It is a theme that started at the inception of education for indigenous youth in the United States, dating back to boarding schools such as Carlisle Indian School. There are barriers that plagued generations before us still that exist. Low expectations are a damaging tool still used by individuals and institutions to suppress the success of Native youth among others. It is within each of us to level this barrier and to set our own expectations. I am also aware that despite being expected to fail, indigenous youth continue to persevere in systems of education and beyond. As a student at Stanford University, I am living proof of this perseverance. We all have resilience born into us.

*That is what we do, we persevere and are resilient in all facets of our lives. That is what our ancestors have taught us. We rely on organizations such as the Center for Native American Youth, Generation Indigenous, and other Native youth programs that work to connect youth with heritage and celebrate our indigenous cultures and remind us that we matter, that we count.*



Sam Schimmel at  
Chena Hot Springs  
PHOTO BY: CNAY

inheritance that survived our ancestors through wars, famines, epidemics, boarding schools, government forced cession of lands, and more. The strength of knowing where you come from and who you are breaks any barrier that may lie ahead.

Upon our traditions, we rely in times of hardship. It is the stories that my Apa told me while sipping tea, and sitting on the wood floor cutting our foods on old cardboard into the early morning from the night before. It is the songs that I learned from the cassette tape that my grandma gave me from old times, so I could hear our drums when I was away, that have always pushed me to succeed.

We have to work together to breach intergenerational trauma and make room for intergenerational healing and learning. We recognize that when one of us succeeds, we all do. Our collective story is one of hope, opportunity, success and belonging. 2019 celebrated many firsts for Alaska Natives and American Indians. It is important to recognize and thank all of you for the continued hard work and perseverance and reminding us that Native Youth Count. It is time to put our minds to the liberation of silent knowledge and the building of transgenerational coalitions. Never forget that it is within our traditions that our future lies.

Lookout 2020!



CNAY Youth Advisory Board Members at  
Chief Seattle Club with Colleen Echohawk  
PHOTO BY: CNAY

Just like our ancestors fought, we are still fighting today. Today, our battles are much different; we all know someone who has been raped, murdered, abused, committed suicide or is incarcerated. We don't just know them; we are related to them and they are us. We don't need to hide or be ashamed of these memories and realities. We carry them with us for the rest of our lives, but we also carry culture and tradition that has been passed down to us. This is the same inalienable

## Representative Deb Haaland

NEW MEXICO 1ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

**F**or too long, our history has been told to us. Native American experiences were written down by those who did not know our culture, our traditions, or way of life. Those outside Native communities created these fictions — fictions that stole our voice and told us who we were and continued to define centuries of corrosive federal policies that continue to impact our Tribes and Pueblos today. But now — as we look forward — we can ensure that Native voices and leadership shape our own narratives and that Native people are in positions to make critical decisions to improve conditions for the next generations of indigenous youth.

Sitting idly by and hoping for empathy will not bring us the justice we desire. We must ensure that we all do our part to encourage the diversity that will lead us into the future. All levels of governance would benefit from indigenous representation where we — especially Native women — have historically lacked a voice. In order for America and tribal governments to be representative of the people, our leadership must first and foremost truly represent the people.

We *must* do better — if not for ourselves, for future generations and future leaders. The 2019 federal and state elections have only begun to show our communities that Native voices are valued in America and this message will continue to empower the next generation of indigenous leadership. For all of the youth that have continuously felt disempowered and disenfranchised, I would like you to know and remember: ***we hear your voice and it is valued.***

After I was first elected to represent New Mexico's 1st Congressional District, as one of the first Native American women in Congress, I attended the Indigenous Peoples March in Washington, D.C. During that event, I had the privilege of speaking about missing and murdered indigenous women. It was a beautiful moment of unification that proved that we will no longer be silenced. While standing on the white marble steps of the Lincoln Memorial overlooking the National Mall with the great symbols of democracy, I felt the wind blowing my sister's red ribbon skirt against my legs knowing that this was the location where Martin Luther King, Jr. had given his "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington in 1963.

Fifty-six years later, I found myself at the same location where one of our most important civil rights leaders encouraged his community to take agency in their collective voice to end racism in the United States. That day, I had hoped to instill a willingness in all of us to stand up for our stolen sisters — an achievable dream that we must all have.



*We hear your  
voice and  
it is valued.*

Indigenous people in this country were not at first factored into the American dream, but we have found our voices, and we now refuse to stand by while the injustice and oppression of failed federal policies have tried to erase us from our own country and its history. We are showing up and standing up!

My dream is to wield the spotlight and show, in numbers, that we are loud and strong. We *must* march to the polls for the 2020 Presidential election. We must march to ensure full participation in the 2020 Census. Every vote counts. Every person counts. By participating in these critical national measures, we can let those who have attempted to silence and erase us see that we will no longer be underrepresented, underfunded, or underserved.

Our history is also one of broken promises and betrayed trust. That is why this year I, along with my colleague Senator Elizabeth Warren, introduced our legislative proposal entitled "*Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act*" to address chronic underfunding and barriers to self-determination in Indian Country. While we bear the history, plight, and trauma of colonialism, we will take long-overdue congressional action to end its tyranny on tribal communities.

Similarly, I had the help of my colleagues to introduce the "*Not Invisible Act of 2019*," to bridge the jurisdictional gaps in public safety that continues to lead to the unnecessary loss of Native American lives. The *Not Invisible Act* is the first bill in history to be introduced by four members of federally recognized Tribes — the only four Native American members of Congress in the U.S. House of Representatives: Sharice Davids (Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin), Tom Cole (Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma), and Markwayne Mullin (Cherokee Nation).

*This* is why Native American representation at the state and federal levels matter — we know the critical issues that impact our communities because we have lived them and have the collective voice to make a real change. We *must* encourage Native people to run for elected positions so we can continue to have and expand this voice. However, the work that is accomplished in Washington D.C. is nothing without the support of our Native Nations and our young people. Paying homage to Martin Luther King, Jr., President Obama once said:

*The premise that we're all created equal is the opening line in the American story. While we don't promise equal outcomes, we have strived to deliver equal opportunity — the idea that success doesn't depend on being born into wealth or privilege, it depends on effort and merit. And with every chapter we've added to that story, we've worked hard to put those words into practice.*

I hope that on that cold January day while I stood on the white marble steps of the Lincoln Memorial in my red ribbon skirt, that my voice contributed to the authentic opening line in the lesser known Native American story. I will continue to strive to ensure that all Native Americans receive equal outcomes when our people go missing and the stories of all indigenous people are heard in the halls of congress.

In reviewing this report, I am more confident than ever that our future is bright. Let us continue to encourage those around us — especially our youth — to ascend higher and higher on the wooden rungs of the ladders that past generations built for us that brought us here today. Our voices will be carried by our youth on their journey into the unyielding sky to be heard by generations to come.

We must make sure that they never stop dreaming.



Congresswomen Deb Haaland with 2019 Champions for Change  
PHOTO BY: CNAY



Congresswoman Deb Haaland speaks about Violence Against Women Act on Capitol Hill  
PHOTO BY: CNAY

## Erik Stegman

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH



PHOTO BY: CNAY

**N**ative youth count. Their voices, ideas, cultures, achievements, connections—all of these are integral to the passionate dedication that shapes and guides Native youth. Throughout the year, the Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) works to ensure that the positive work youth are doing is amplified, supported, and nurtured. To carry out this mission, CNAY works on different levels to shift the narrative of harmful stereotypes that surround Native Americans. We are reimagining and building a new narrative, one that illuminates Native youth as trailblazers, movement builders, and cultural preservationists. This report serves as a demonstration of the groundbreaking work of Native youth and it stands as a roadmap to help decrease barriers and increase opportunity for youth.

This year, our focus for our annual State of Native Youth Report is “Native Youth Count,” as we illustrate the importance of inclusion and representation in spaces, systems, and institutions that have historically lacked indigenous voices. We discuss why being counted in the 2020 Census is critical, and we describe the impact of representation on the lives of youth. We share about some of the people, initiatives, and organizations that help develop today’s youth as well as future generations of young people. Throughout the report, you will see the remarkable ways that young leaders and advocates are working to use their culture and ancestral knowledge to ensure a strong future for tribal communities.



Erik and Generation Indigenous Movement Builder Fellows at the Aspen Institute  
PHOTO BY: CNAY

Indigenous youth lead through their interconnectedness. They set the example for building relationships across nations and communities, taking a stand against wrongdoings, and strengthening their cultural foundations to adapt and innovate in this ever-changing world. Now is the time to learn from Native youth and stand beside them as they work to improve the future of this country and this planet. The following is a summary of some of the important themes and findings from this year’s report.

### HISTORIC INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION

The thread that weaves this report together is the determined resolution of Native youth to be seen and heard, to have their voices make a difference. As we explore throughout the report, representation manifests at the federal government level, the state level, and the local level. The report highlights how the historic election of Deb Haaland and Sharice Davids to U.S. Congress

influenced young people and showed them a new path, one that includes and values their voice at the table. Youth are demanding respect for the nation-to-nation treaty responsibility between tribal nations and the federal government. Their policy priorities range from climate change to child welfare, and youth are utilizing various internships, fellowships, and scholarships to continue growing and learning about the issues they care about. Although we live in a tumultuous time when the country is bitter, divided, and frightened, Native youth are turning to the foundations of their indigenous identity and the hundreds of years of wisdom and strength of their ancestors. They draw power and knowledge from roots that precede all modern political institutions.

One timely challenge on the minds and hearts of many Native youth is the crisis at the southern border of the United States. Generations of indigenous people have wrestled with notions of citizenship and fought for their people to not be separated or face barriers to crossing the land that was once their land. Indigenous people have struggled with these imaginary and arbitrary notions of citizenship for generations. In 2019, Native youth recognize the problems with the current processes at the border and are standing up against the mistreatment of the many indigenous people of Central America who are seeking safety and opportunity in the United States.

In addition to these issues, we detail the importance of the 2020 Census and how being counted is vital to the prosperity of Tribal Nations. Native youth and their partners are organizing and mobilizing at all levels to address some of the biggest issues of today — they are taking a stand on matters like the crisis at the border, human trafficking in their communities, and child welfare legislation. These topics and the youth, programs, and services on the ground are discussed in the Citizenship chapter.



2019 Champions for Change with CNAY at the Aspen Institute

PHOTO BY: CNAY



CNAY Champions for Change and MHA Champions for Change at State of Indian Nations 2019

PHOTO BY: CNAY

## REIMAGINING A CULTURE OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Living a full and healthy life is of deep importance to Native youth. Though they encounter significant physical, mental, social, and emotional challenges, youth are guided by their culture to help them make healthy choices. One of the growing arenas in which youth are re-indigenizing health is through nutrition and work with food systems. Native youth experience the highest rates of diabetes for all races and are 30 percent more likely than non-Hispanic whites to be obese.<sup>1</sup> However, Native youth leaders are battling these widespread health conditions by revitalizing ancestral diets, reconnecting with nature, creating social media campaigns, and advocating for equitable sexual and reproductive healthcare.

Youth feel empowered when their health is strong and they are able to live full and connected lives with strong community and family ties. It is important to acknowledge the overall community health and the role it plays in an individual's wellbeing. When a community is strong, they can better support their youth and help guide them through challenges and hardships they may face.

*Youth feel empowered when their health is strong and they are able to live full and connected lives with strong community and family ties.*

## INDIGENOUS VALUES SHAPING EDUCATION AND JOBS

A growing movement of language revitalization has ignited across the country, and we discuss how valuable language learning is as well as the broader vision for education through a Native lens. We hear from youth who are working to preserve cultural ties and to advocate for the presence of indigenous ways in the school setting, including special events like graduation ceremonies. Many schools maintain harmful, race-based mascots, and we describe the impact these mascots have on youth and their development.

We also discuss employment rates among Native people and various paths for Native youth entering the workforce. There are culturally-relevant workforce development programs designed with indigenous cultures in mind, and the report highlights some of these programs and their impact. In addition, we share how community wealth building is grounded in indigenous values and include examples of organizations that are building the capacity of their community to gain financial prosperity.

## GUARDIANS OF THE LAND, SACRED SITES, AND WATERWAYS

Native youth are also focusing on being good stewards of the environment. Across the country, Native youth have led initiatives and demonstrations as concerns have risen about indigenous rights and sacred sites, climate change,

and traditional ecological knowledge. Connection to the land is central to indigenous cultures, and Native youth understand the power it has to heal their communities. The protest against Dakota Access Pipeline at the Standing Rock reservation was led by youth in a powerful display of resistance, and youth continue to push against those who want to damage land and sacred sites.



Tribal Chairman Juan Mancias of Carrizo/ Comecrudo Nation of Texas at the National Voices Network Gathering in McAllen, Texas.  
PHOTO BY: CNAY

Climate change is also a pressing concern for Native youth. As we discuss in the Sacred Sites, Lands, and Waterways chapter, communities in places like Alaska are relocating because their traditional lands are no longer safe to inhabit. Meanwhile, tribal communities in other parts of the country like California and South Dakota are experiencing dramatic shifts in weather patterns and an increase in catastrophic weather events. Many youth are working to prevent more damage to the environment and are

passionate about uniting on this timely issue. Native youth raise their voices to advocate for tribal consultation on topics related to the changing climate and they are backed by the knowledge formed from their people's years of close observation and dependence on the land and its resources. Furthermore, youth are keeping this traditional ecological knowledge alive by carrying on old ways like subsistence fishing for salmon and other animals.

### SHAPING SYSTEMS INVOLVING NATIVE YOUTH

The trajectory of a Native youth's life is often shaped at a young age and is determined by institutions and systems like the child welfare system and the education system. In the Systems Involving Youth Chapter, we discuss how the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) faced significant opposition in courts and how the law serves children and families. The issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) is a critical topic and we shed light on the facts of the issue and highlight youth who are working to raise awareness to help end the crisis. In 2019, there was more political movement around MMIW, with the first MMIW hearing to ever take place in the U.S. House as well as support from Rep. Deb. Haaland who is a passionate advocate for MMIW. Additionally, the issue of human trafficking is included as Native women and girls experience

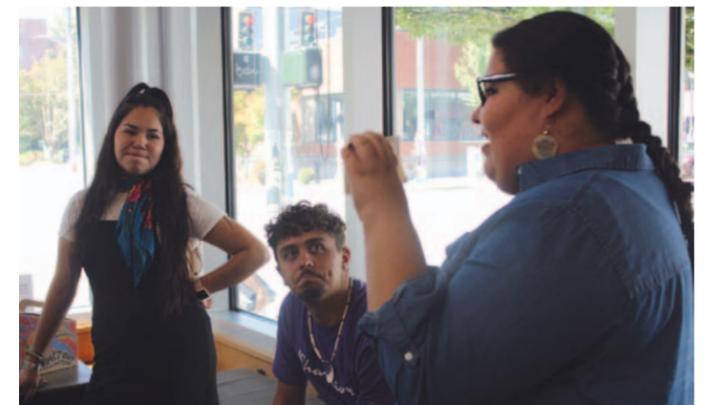
particularly high rates of trafficking and are more vulnerable to it than other ethnic groups. Native youth continue to come together to ideate solutions to keep their communities safe. They exhibit bravery and a strong sense of duty in their dedication to guarding their people and trying to build safer environments.

### CONNECTING MOVEMENTS AND LEADERS TO BUILD STRENGTH AND UNITY

Native youth are helping their communities heal from trauma, and they are using innovative ways to empower and bring one another together across tribal nations. Their ability to remain grounded in their values while coming together around shared experiences and a bold vision for the future should be a model for us all on how to build momentum and work with others. As you read through this report, we hope you are inspired by the youth who are steadfast in their commitment and actions to improve and heal their communities. Their positive impacts are changing the world, and their light shines with the power from generations of ancestors who paved the way.



CNAY Youth Advisory Board Policy Platform & Strategic Planning Meeting  
PHOTO BY: CNAY



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## CHAPTER 1

## Health and Wellness



National Institute of Health visit the Aspen Institute

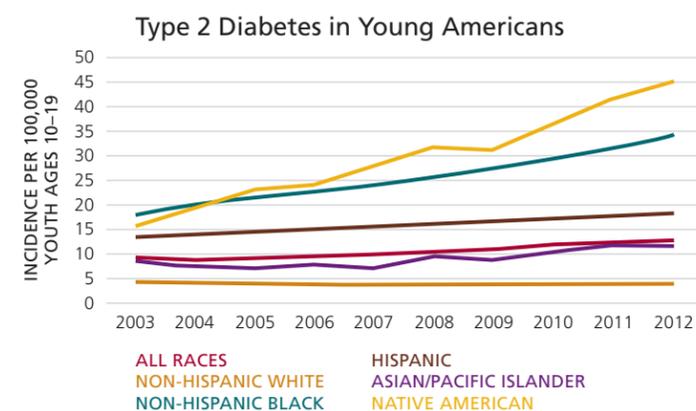
PHOTO BY: CNAY

**N**ative youth are on a mission to lead full and healthy lives. Much of this work involves re-indigenizing health and wellness through shifting mindsets, practicing traditional ways, and re-envisioning the image of a healthy community. Native Americans were once the healthiest people in the Americas as they lived in harmony with the natural landscape, resources, and each other. However, colonization over the last 500 years has directly led to Native Americans suffering from some of the worst health disparities in the United States. Native youth are working in the arenas of food, community and mental health, and sexual health, among others, to unravel and restore health and their ancestors' traditional ways of wellness.

## Food Access and Traditional Foods

Traditional foodways of indigenous peoples were built around subsistence principles and a close connection to land; diets varied greatly based on geographic place. Since time immemorial, culture has been threaded in hunting, gathering, and sharing meals with community. These practices also build cultural knowledge and bring people together. However, many elements of traditional foodways were disturbed during forced removal and relocations that separated people from their native land. The loss of Native food sovereignty significantly changed the food landscape in urban and rural communities, and this has brought about a nutrition transition from traditional foods to the adoption of high-calorie, nutrient-poor foods that are widely available and more affordable than other foods. This shift in diet, along with elements of food insecurity and limited access to food, has contributed to large health disparities for many

Native Americans. Research shows that Native American adolescents are 30 percent more likely than non-Hispanic whites to be obese.<sup>1</sup> Due to a colonized diet, Native Americans have the highest rates of diabetes, a condition that was essentially nonexistent less than a century ago, with 15.1% of American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) diagnosed with



[HTTPS://WWW.LATIMES.COM/SCIENCE/SCIENCENOW/LA-SCI-SN-DIABETES-YOUTH-RISING-20170413-HTMLSTORY.HTML](https://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-diabetes-youth-rising-20170413-htmlstory.html)

# SPOTLIGHT

## IAC Youth Programming

The Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) Youth Programming is a national program that holds Native Youth Food Sovereignty Summits all across the country throughout the year. The IAC works to create a pipeline for youth to professions in agriculture. IAC Youth Programming works towards connecting Native youth with a variety of career opportunities within food and agriculture. IAC provides Native youth with the proper tools and information to take back to their own communities to make a change within their own food systems. Since 2016, IAC has hosted over 20 regional summits, over 18 national summits and outreach opportunities, impacting over 500 youth and more than 120 tribes. IAC Youth Programming has an ingrained commitment to the next generation of Indian Country's agricultural leaders through our fellowship and apprenticeship programming that offers direct support from High School until career placement.

PHOTOS: IAC Youth Discussions in different regions of the country  
PHOTOS: COURTESY OF IAC



Type II diabetes.<sup>2</sup> These poor health outcomes are reducing quality of life, shortening life spans, and inhibiting prosperity for many Native people.

To reduce the number of people affected by these conditions, food systems in Indian Country must be altered so that healthy, affordable, and culturally-relevant foods are easy to access.

One approach to this is to improve the number of grocery stores in tribal communities and also the quality and variety of foods offered in such grocery stores. Further, alternative models like food cooperatives and integrated food systems are rising in popularity and could be important to re-imagining food economies with a food sovereignty lens. An example is Mazopiya in Prior Lake, Minnesota. Mazopiya is a tribally-owned natural foods store on Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community's (SMSC) tribal land.<sup>3</sup> The store is an important piece of SMSC's mission to be "a good neighbor, a good employer, and a good steward of the earth," and they demonstrate food sovereignty through their focus on Native American vendors and offerings of natural, organic, and local foods that are reasonably priced and produced by ethical businesses.



Mazopiya Storefront  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF MAZOPIYA

Low-Income  
People Living  
Within Walking  
Distance To  
A Grocery Store:

**63.6%**  
US POPULATION

**27.8%**  
TRIBAL AREAS

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that 25.6% of the population in tribal reservations lived 1 mile or less from a grocery store; for the US population, that number is 58.8%.<sup>4</sup> Nationally, 63.6% of low-income people live within walking distance to a grocery store, while in tribal areas, only 27.8% of low-income people live within walking distance of a grocery store.<sup>5</sup> In response, many tribes have developed community gardens to feed their people with healthy, fresh foods. In addition, some communities have implemented gardening education programs so that participants can learn gardening skills and start their own gardens. For example, the Oyate Teca Project on the Pine Ridge Reservation is a year-long gardening education program that trains and teaches adults about food production, entrepreneurship for gardeners, financial planning, and traditional food storage.<sup>6</sup> Programs like Oyate Teca demonstrate the powerful work being done to strengthen the tribal economy, indigenous food sovereignty, improve community wellbeing and support self-determination of indigenous peoples.

The national data for food insecurity rates among AI/ANs indicates alarming levels of food insecurity. Research studies suggest that food insecurity is higher among Native people living in urban areas than those living in rural areas.<sup>7</sup> AI/ANs differ from all other racial/ethnic groups in this way, as groups living in urban areas tend to have lower rates of food security in comparison to their rural counterparts. This could be due to high poverty rates for urban AI/ANs along with low access to culturally-informed human services as well as lack of food-sharing, sociocultural resources, and tribally-provided resources that exist in rural communities. Nevertheless, this warrants a call for Native people living in urban areas to be at the forefront of discussion and activity around reducing hunger.

There is a movement to re-integrate traditional foods into diets and to expand food sovereignty to improve health and decrease food insecurity rates. Representatives Deb Haaland, Ben Ray Lujan, and Raúl M. Grijalva recently introduced the Tribal Nutrition Improvement Act that would allow tribes to administer Child Nutrition Programs like the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program.<sup>8</sup> This act would make it easier for tribal nutrition programs to operate by giving program administration control to tribes instead of state agencies. Zach Ducheneaux, Executive Director of the Intertribal Agriculture Council and Co-Chair of the Native Farm Bill Coalition, said "The Tribal Nutrition Improvement Act will not only provide improved food access for Native youth, but it also creates opportunities for Indian Country's farmers and ranchers to incorporate Native and traditional foods in school and after-school feeding programs."

Another federal feeding program, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), has recently incorporated traditional foods like wild rice and bison, when available, into the food packages it distributes on reservations. Federal policies like this are a step in the right direction, and moving forward, should work to be more specific so that the traditional foods offered are aligned with the local tribe's historic diets. Meanwhile, Native youth are working to revitalize traditional foods and educate others about the importance of diet and health. Megan Forcia is a young Ojibwe woman passionate about improving individual, community, and environmental health through the revitalization of indigenous food systems. As an undergraduate, she majored in American Indian Studies with an emphasis on environmental sustainability. Today, Megan serves as the Native American Programs Coordinator for the University of Minnesota's Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute, where she helps to coordinate the first and only national conference on Native American nutrition. Megan also serves as the Midwest Regional Representative and Board Secretary for the Native Youth Food Sovereignty Alliance (NYFSA), a national youth-led movement with the mission of educating and empowering indigenous youth to be agricultural innovators for generations to come. Focusing on holistic wellness, she incorporates yoga and body work into conversations around historical trauma and healing. Megan says, "The health of our young people directly translates into the health of our nations. Our young people are receiving messages every day about the brokenness of our communities and our environment. It's time we rewrite that story and empower young people with messages of hope and healing."



Megan Forcia

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MEGAN FORCIA

Regaining control over the food system in Indian Country supports the ability of Native youth to thrive and restore their health, and the health of their communities and future generations. It improves local economies and reconnects people with traditional foods, revitalizing culture and re-imagining the relationship between individuals, tribal communities, and food.



*The health of our young people directly translates into the health of our nations. Our young people are receiving messages every day about the brokenness of our communities and our environment. It's time we rewrite that story and empower young people with messages of hope and healing.*

— MEGAN FORCIA

NYFSA panel at the 2019 Native American Nutrition Conference  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NATIVE AMERICAN NUTRITION CONFERENCE

## Community Health and Mental Health

Community health focuses on utilizing and improving the foundational elements of a community to improve the health of its people. Fostering community health requires an interdisciplinary approach to promoting health and often includes a variety of programs and strategies to elevate the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of indigenous peoples. Some elements of community health include healthy traditional food preparation, physical activity, language incorporation, diabetes education, cultural activities, education and support with substance abuse, and many other arenas.

The fostering of community health has important ties to mental health. A history of traumatic and destructive policies and practices toward Native Americans has resulted in Native peoples having persistently high rates of mental illness; thus, indigenous people are implementing innovative solutions that value traditional knowledge and the sacredness of life in order to reduce the internal and external harm surrounding mental illness. A resurgence in the traditional value of interconnectedness is a powerful mechanism in achieving wellness and balance. Research shows that social inclusion and connectedness improve community mental health by counteracting the harmful symptoms of disconnection.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, time spent in nature can have benefits for one's mental state.<sup>10</sup> As Madison White, Mohawk Nation of Akwesasne and 2019 CNAY Champion for Change, says "Nature is medicine, and it is free medicine."



Madison White Champions for Change Week

PHOTO BY: CNAY

In our annual Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) survey, Native youth brought up the need for outlets for youth to come together in social, recreational settings. They lamented a distinct lack of activities and spaces for young people, with one youth saying, "It's hard for teens in my area to have a social life because there is nowhere to have a social life. Teens in my area usually hangout with their friends in a parking lot, especially the Walmart parking lot. It's sad that our community has nothing for teens." Lack of activities in community lead to behaviors that, ultimately, impact potential for success. This includes behaviors that are not part of a traditional cultural lifestyle. As former Student Success Coordinator at the Mandan, Hidatsa & Arikara (MHA) Nation's Education Department, Kateri Hale states, "Our students don't have activities or things to do, so they look for an escape — drugs, alcohol, and at times, suicide attempts." Suicide clusters are more common in Indian Country. The two states with the highest rates of youth suicide clusters were also the states with the largest population of AI/ANs.<sup>11</sup> Native peoples have the highest rates of suicide of all racial/ethnic groups in the

country.<sup>12</sup> Thus, it is vital to build community health for a foundation that can better support youth and help mitigate the issue of youth suicide. MHA Champion for Change, Terrain Poitra resides in Mandaree, North Dakota. At Mandaree High School, Terrain recognizes the impacts of bullying and how it can lead a young person to question self-value and worth. Her platform as an MHA Champ focused on bullying and promoting self-love to address suicide in the Fort Berthold community. She has done this through suicide prevention walks, and most notably, through her artwork. At CNAY, we know that a tribal community's overall health and wellbeing is dependent on youth wellness; communities prosper and thrive when their youth have space and programs that encourage their development and affirm their identity.



Terrain Poitra 2018 MHA  
Champion for Change  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF TERRAIN POITRA

One example of such a program is the Reducing Risk through Interpersonal Development, Empowerment, Resiliency, and Self Determination (RezRIDERS). RezRIDERS is a “tribally-driven youth empowerment program designed to deter substance abuse and depression symptomology among high-risk American Indian youth while increasing hope/optimism, self-efficacy, and pro-social bonding.”<sup>13</sup> The curriculum integrates extreme sports like rock climbing and white water rafting, indigenous cognitive and behavioral teachings, program supervision and cultural mentorship through a Tribal Research Team, and community action projects that seek to address youth-recognized community issues. RezRIDERS builds cultural identity, social ties, and community belonging for youth of the Pueblo of Jemez in New Mexico as well as other communities. The program directly resists notions of inadequacy by empowering youth, thereby improving the wellbeing of their community. This program is grounded and carried out by indigenous leaders, and it successfully engages, challenges, and empowers youth while shaping them into leaders who are better equipped to live self-sufficient and healthy lives while also handling adversity.



*When I applied for RezRIDERS I was really depressed, but when I tried snowboarding it changed my mentality a lot. I think that has impacted me. RezRIDERS teaches that you can't just give up when it's hard. RezRIDERS has changed my life a lot.*

RezRIDERS participants snowboarding  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF REZRIDERS



RezRIDERS participants  
climbing (left) and  
whitewater rafting  
(right)  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF REZRIDERS

*The whole experience made me understand more of myself. I have more confidence that I didn't know I had. And then just being around the people that encouraged me, and they gave me motivation to push myself. I knew I had these people around me that saw the best in me, so it kind of made me push myself and do it because I had people that believed in me.*

— REZRIDERS PARTICIPANT



In order to uplift youth and decrease the rates of youth mental illness, it is key to consider how a strategy that centers community support and community health can play a role in acknowledging, addressing, and building up mental health. In all approaches, the solutions must value and reflect the traditions, culture, and diversity of Native peoples.

## Sexual Health and Reproductive Rights

We are living in a time where policies related to women's reproductive rights are regularly debated and challenged. It is important to consider the issue through the lens of Native peoples, who consistently have the highest rates of teen pregnancies among all races. In 2017, the birth rate for AI/AN teens was 32.9%.<sup>14</sup>

In the wake of high rates of adolescent pregnancies and motherhood, there is an urgent call for more robust, effective, and culturally-relevant education on sexual health for Native youth. In our Gen-I survey, 82% of respondents said their community needs programs and resources focused on sexual health including information about reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases and more. One program to improve sexual health and reduce the rates of adolescent pregnancies is Respecting the Circle of Life, a culturally-informed sexual health curriculum created by the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health.

The curriculum is grounded in indigenous values and is taught by Native American educators through a camp that offers activities such as drumming, beadwork, dance, and presentations on traditional medicine by elders.<sup>15</sup> There is also an in-home component where the educators deliver lessons in the participant's home with their parents. The evaluation showed that the program increased knowledge of STIs and HIV/AIDS. In addition, the program improved participants' confidence in using condoms and comfort in talking about sex with others. Since its inception, the program has spread across the country, from rural Arizona to Minneapolis, MN. Many community groups, such as the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center, are implementing the program to reach youth who are not enrolled in school, thus not receiving information through a sexual education course. Programs such as this one help improve the health and wellbeing of Native youth while also reducing the stigma around sexual health.

Despite the work being done to improve sexual health outcomes, it is important to keep in mind the situations of youth who lack access to this knowledge and who often lack access to reproductive care. The Indian Health Service (IHS) does not provide abortions due to government prohibition of funds for abortion services, thus many Native people already have limited access and few, if any, choices with regard to abortion services since private health care is often financially inaccessible.<sup>16</sup> Abortion services are not included in the healthcare services offered by IHS, and they offer fewer options for birth control relative to other healthcare providers.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the rampant involuntary or coerced sterilization of thousands of Native women by IHS in the 1960s and 1970s must be taken into consideration when discussing action around the reproductive rights of Native women. It is important for Native youth to remain involved in the political arena and to voice their opinions on important matters such as the reproductive rights of women, so that they may lead safe and healthy lives.

## CREATIVE NATIVE CALL FOR ART 2019



**ARTIST NAME:**  
WILLIAM P.

**AGE:** 21

**TRIBAL AFFILIATION:**  
WICHITA (AND AFFILIATED  
TRIBES), KIOWA TRIBE  
OF OKLAHOMA, AND  
CHEYENNE RIVER SIOUX

It's about sharing ones' "value" in order to continue growth in their culture/country. As Native Youths we are following the footsteps of our ancestors who contributed their ideas/thoughts to improve said culture/country, so should we. The phrase "I count" spoke to me as "rather than being a number, I'm someone that has value and is significant. We belong to our culture/country as citizens and should feel accepted. Today we struggle with that idea. In order to feel accepted we should share our ideas/thoughts more to improve our culture/country and create growth so that one day we can achieve absolute acceptance.

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## 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.” This term is often used in reference to collected data about the population.<sup>1</sup>

**Food insecurity** refers to the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, culturally-appropriate, nutritious food.<sup>2</sup>

**Food system** is “all the stages of keeping us fed: growing, harvesting, packing, processing, transforming, marketing, consuming and disposing of food.”<sup>3</sup>

**Generation Indigenous (Gen-I)** is a 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. As part of the initiative, CNAY manages the National Native Youth Network of Gen-I. For more information about the Gen-I Network, visit [www.cnay.org](http://www.cnay.org).<sup>4</sup>

**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.”<sup>5</sup>

**Indian Reservation** “is an area of land re-served for a tribe or tribes under treaty or other agreement with the United States, executive order, or federal statute or administrative action as permanent tribal homelands, and where the federal government holds title to the land in trust on behalf of the tribe.”<sup>6</sup>

**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 U.S. residents from Canada First Nations and indigenous communities in Central and South America. For the purposes of CNAY, Native American refers to any self-identifying individual of indigenous ancestry in the Americas.<sup>7</sup>

**Native food sovereignty** refers to “the right of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians to produce their own traditional foods on their own lands to sustain themselves, their families and their communities.”<sup>8</sup>

**Suicide cluster** occurs when “several suicides or suicide attempts occur close together in time and/or place and are beyond what would be expected to occur by chance.”<sup>9</sup>

**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 U.S. that is entitled to federal trust obligations. There are currently 567 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Each tribe is distinct, with its own culture, traditions, language, and community. CNAY, however, also represents state-recognized tribes and tribes not recognized by state or federal governments. When using the word tribe in our work, we are referring to all tribes in the United States unless specifically outlined as a federally recognized tribe.<sup>10</sup>

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## CHAPTER 2

Systems  
Involving  
Youth

Rosalie Fish, Cowlitz Tribe, at 2019 Tribal Canoe Journey to Lummi

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ROSALIE FISH

**D**ue to the longstanding relationship between tribes and the United States, Native youth interact daily with various systems at multiple levels; tribal, local, state, and federal systems all play important roles in the lives of Native youth. These systems have the power to restore safety to communities, to unite children with their cultures and families, and to protect people from violence. The United States' deep and historic trust relationship with tribes asserts that the federal government has an obligation to ensure the wellbeing, sovereignty, and protection of tribes. Yet, some of these systems are malfunctioning in severe, life-altering ways. Native youth recognize the need for reformation in these systems, and they are connecting and joining from across the country to elevate the issues of MMIWG, child welfare, and human trafficking.

Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous Women and Girls

The deeply-rooted, overlooked crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) extends among tribal, rural and urban Native peoples. The issue of MMIWG has recently received an increase in political interest due to activists' unyielding drive to raise the issue and put an end to the shameful disregard of Native women's safety and livelihood. In the United States, Native women experience violence at a higher rate than any other racial/ethnic group.<sup>1</sup> The third leading cause of death for AI/AN women between the ages of 10 and 24 is homicide.<sup>2</sup> On some reservations, the homicide rate for AI/AN women is 10 times higher than the national average.<sup>3</sup> In 2016, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) found that more than 4 in 5, or 84.3 percent, of AI/AN women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. Native women experience physical violence from a partner at 55.5% while for non-Hispanic white women the number is 34.5%. Additionally, 97% of female victims experience violence at some point in their life from a perpetrator that is non-Native.<sup>4</sup> The violence Native women face is persistent and profound, and the evidence clearly signals a broken system of safety.

**4 in 5** AI/AN women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime.

The current reauthorization of Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) restored the sovereign authority of tribes to prosecute non-Native offenders for certain domestic violence offenses on tribal land and provides tribal courts more authority in prosecution of crimes that occur on their land. Despite these improvements to the law, there remain jurisdictional barriers and challenges to the prosecution of offenders on tribal land in some situations. The continual violence against women indicates that more must be done for tribal governments to have the authority and capacity needed to effectively safeguard and ensure justice for their people. In addition to issues related to crime prosecution, there is also an alarming lack of comprehensive data on MMIWG that contributes to the severity of the issue. A study by the Urban Indian Health Institute found that only 116 of the 5,712 cases of murdered or missing Native women were logged into the Department of Justice’s nationwide database.<sup>5</sup> It also found that a minimum of 506 indigenous women and girls across 71 cities have been murdered or gone missing since 2010.<sup>6</sup> A national effort to capture the information relating to MMIW is critically important to seeking justice. Without accurate and comprehensive data, it is difficult to understand the scope of the issue, and it is even more difficult to move forward with congressional action.

In March 2019, the US House of Representatives held its first-ever hearing on MMIW. Representative Deb Haaland, a strong advocate and leader on the issue, said, “Indigenous women deserve to be protected just like anyone else in this country [...] Native women have historically lacked representation and protections in the United States Congress, and we must continue to fight for basic protections that are afforded to other groups of people.” A hearing on MMIW was also held in the US Senate to discuss bills related to violence against Native women and children. However, officials from the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Indian Affairs were unable to provide input on the administration’s view of the bills. Although mandates on the federal level are slow to move forward, there is important work being carried out at the local and state levels. For



*Indigenous women deserve to be protected just like anyone else in this country [...] Native women have historically lacked representation and protections in the United States Congress, and we must continue to fight for basic protections that are afforded to other groups of people.*

— REPRESENTATIVE DEB HAALAND

Erik Stegman and Shandiin Herrera on Capitol Hill  
PHOTO BY: CNAY



Jordan Marie Brings Three White Horses Daniel  
Boston Marathon 2019  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF JORDAN DANIEL

*As Native Americans, we are born into politics.*

—ROSALIE FISH



Rosalie Fish  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF ROSALIE FISH

example, a community-wide forum on MMIW was recently held in New Mexico and brought together approximately 100 tribal officials, stakeholders, and other leaders.<sup>7</sup> In addition, a new law in South Dakota requires the collection of data on MMIW and establishes processes for investigating cases involving children and women.<sup>8</sup> Both of these examples are steps in the right direction to ending the shameful disregard for Native lives.

Further, Native youth are advocating on the issue of MMIWG in a multitude of ways across the country. Jordan Marie Brings Three White Horses Daniel, Lakota, ran the Boston Marathon in 2019 and raised awareness of the issue through a red painted hand over her mouth and the letters MMIW painted on her legs. For each of the 26 miles of the marathon, Jordan prayed for a different missing indigenous woman. Inspired by Jordan Marie Daniel and following in her footsteps was Rosalie Fish, a member of the Cowlitz/Muckleshoot Indian Tribes and recent graduate of the Muckleshoot Tribal School. Rosalie competed in her state track meet with a red hand painted on her mouth and MMIW painted on her legs.<sup>9</sup> In each of her four races at the meet, Rosalie paid tribute to an indigenous woman from her community who is missing or was murdered. She dedicated the 1600 meter race to Alice Looney, the 800 to Jacqueline Salyers, the 3200 to Renee Davis, and the 400 to Misty Upham.

Rosalie says, “After I saw Jordan Marie Daniel run at the Boston Marathon with the red handprint and initials painted on herself, it made me realize that I needed to do more with my running. This had been the first time I witnessed a Native woman using her running platform to bring awareness. After asking her permission and acknowledging the work Daniel puts in to this cause, I dedicated each of my races at State Championships to a missing or murdered Indigenous woman in my community. I now take every opportunity presented to me to raise awareness and inform non-Natives about the severity of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, as well as raise and support Indigenous voices. With the work I put in, I hope to raise Indigenous visibility within the U.S. as well as advocate for the needs of tribal communities. As Native Americans, we are born into politics. It is important for youth to acknowledge and accept their role in shaping the future of their Native communities. This means: inciting change and trying to create solutions to the problems around you, not allowing others to look over you, and protecting Native brothers and sisters.”

The federal government has a “trust responsibility to assist tribal governments in safeguarding the lives of Indian women,” as outlined in VAWA. Native women have a right to feel safe and protected. As youth work to bring awareness

to the issue, it is imperative for action to be taken so that these women and future generations are safe from violence and do not have their lives cut short because of a societal and governmental failure to take adequate action on this critical, timely issue.

## Human Trafficking

In Indian Country, human trafficking is prevalent, in part, because traffickers target vulnerable communities who have been impacted by trauma. There are many deep consequences of colonization, and this issue demonstrates how the negative effects of colonization manifest today. Jeri Moomaw, an advocate and trainer with the National Human Trafficking and Technical Assistance Center (NHTTAC) explained, “[Human trafficking] is happening disproportionately to our Native people [due to] intergenerational trauma, lack of resources, lack of employment opportunities, prior abuse, substance use, and jurisdictional challenges. Our communities are fractured...it’s from historical trauma. We need to heal communities [in order] to battle [human trafficking].”<sup>10</sup>



*[Human trafficking] is happening disproportionately to our Native people [due to] intergenerational trauma, lack of resources, lack of employment opportunities, prior abuse, substance use, and jurisdictional challenges. Our communities are fractured...it’s from historical trauma. We need to heal communities [in order] to battle [human trafficking].<sup>10</sup>*

— JERI MOOMAW, ADVOCATE AND TRAINER, NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER (NHTTAC)

Youth are at particular risk, with 37% of sex trafficking cases involving AI/ANs referenced minor victims.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Native women are also at higher risk, as Ashleigh Fixico, Muscogee Creek Nation, says, “Native women especially experience a greater risk [of being trafficked] because of the dehumanization and fetishization their bodies have endured at the hands of mainstream media. When we aren’t seen as human, it’s easy to reduce us to objects of consumption and exploitation.”



Ashleigh Fixico  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF ASHLEIGH FIXICO

Human trafficking of Native people often goes overlooked and victims remain uncounted in data systems on the state and federal level, so the reported number of cases involving Native victims of trafficking is likely lower than the actual number of cases.<sup>12</sup> Reports show that federal investigative agencies typically do not gather information on the Native American status of victims of the cases they are investigating.<sup>13</sup> Further, a study found that almost half of tribal law enforcement agencies reported that they believe human trafficking is happening on tribal land more often than what is brought to their attention.<sup>14</sup> Tribes have jurisdictional challenges and limitations in to enforce the law, and political action is needed to help address this problem so that tribal communities can rebuild a strong sense of safety and protection.



CNAY Cultural Preservation Ambassadors  
PHOTO BY: CNAY

It is critical to consider how youth are impacted by human trafficking and what they can do to raise awareness, inform their communities, and help provide solutions to the issue. On July 24, CNAY hosted a convening with 7 Native youth and the National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center (NHTTAC) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. This gathering centered around the youth’s experiences, thoughts, and ideas around ending human trafficking in their communities. This safe, brave, and healing

space for open dialogue allowed for youth from across the country to participate in a deeply powerful dialogue about the important issue of human trafficking among Native people. Youth were recognized as Cultural Preservation Ambassadors and received support for community action in their respected communities. Covering topics such as culturally-informed services, trauma-informed services, and the root causes of indigenous people’s vulnerability to trafficking are important in building individuals, families, and communities that are better-equipped to address this issue. CNAY’s Cultural Preservation Ambassadors demonstrate bravery and duty in their desire to help protect their communities.

Human trafficking is a violation to traditional ways and values, but a community that is knowledgeable about the issue can help stop trafficking in Indian Country. We must continue to raise awareness and support Native women and youth who are particularly at risk for trafficking. Native youth leaders around the country are dedicated to ending human trafficking in their communities, and

they are using their voices, their ideas, and their experiences to inform these efforts at the local and national level.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING,** please see *Combating Trafficking: Native Youth Toolkit on Human Trafficking*, available at [acf.hhs.gov](http://acf.hhs.gov)

## Child Welfare and the Indian Child Welfare Act

A stable, healthy family is of deep importance to Indigenous peoples and vital to the cohesion of tribal communities. The lasting impact of colonial policies has subverted Native families and led to Native youth being over-represented in the foster care population. For example, in South Dakota, 47.9% of the children in foster care are American Indian or Alaska Native.<sup>15</sup> Prior to the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in 1978, approximately one third of Native children were being removed from their communities and families, often due to social welfare agents' perceived poverty of the household. The children were often placed with non-Native adoptive or foster parents or within institutions such as missionary schools.<sup>16,17</sup> ICWA requires tribes to be notified of foster placements so that the tribes can search for a placement within the child's family or with another tribal member. The ultimate goal is to reunify Native children with their biological family, but if that is not feasible, then they seek to place the child with extended family, an unrelated family of the same tribe, or lastly, another tribe. These groups are given priority in adoption of Native children. The act of severing a child's connections to their culture and families has deep, long-term impacts on youth as well as their home communities who also suffer the loss of the youth. ICWA sought to reform this system and improve outcomes for Native youth by increasing tribal control of youth placements in the foster care system.

Recently, ICWA has been challenged by plaintiffs of Texas, Indiana, and Louisiana on multiple grounds of unconstitutionality.<sup>18</sup> The plaintiffs claim that the law is in violation of the 10th amendment, arguing that ICWA commandeers state's control over foster care and adoption procedures due to the federal government regulations outlined in ICWA. In addition, claims have been made that ICWA is in violation of due process and equal protection rights granted in the 5th and 14th amendments. Another notable element is that ICWA was characterized as

In South Dakota, **47.9%** of the children in foster care are American Indian or Alaska Native.

"race-based," however, the law doesn't benefit only children of a certain race, and the children involved in these cases had tribal ties which stands as a political classification, rather than a racial classification.<sup>19</sup>

Youth demonstrate the importance of ICWA by sharing their personal experiences with the foster care system and instances where ICWA was not upheld, often resulting in troubling community and cultural reconnection challenges. In the cases where children were separated from their communities and tribal cultures, youth are seeking ways to learn and get involved. In our annual Gen-I survey of indigenous youth, 83% of respondents called for opportunities for Native youth in foster care to connect with their tribal community and culture.

This issue of cultural identity within the child welfare system is not to be taken lightly. Consideration of the trajectory of a child's life is necessary when making decisions regarding a Native child's best interests. One's identity is largely shaped by the people and environment they grow up with and around, so it is vital to protect ICWA, thereby preserving youth's ties to their family and communities.

## Spotlight

### IllumiNative

Created and led by Native peoples, IllumiNative is a new nonprofit initiative designed to increase the visibility of — and challenge the negative narrative about — Native Nations and peoples in American society. For decades, the lack of representation and information about Native peoples has perpetuated damaging myths and stereotypes. The Center for Native American Youth partnered with IllumiNative to bring 17 diverse Native youth leaders from across the country together to participate in the first-ever Design Lab, hosted by Buffalo Nickel Creative in the heart of the Osage Nation. Youth learned about the latest research on how the public understands Native people, developed a Native youth-led strategy for narrative change, designed and launched a new national campaign for Indigenous People's Day, and developed creative content to support the strategy and campaign.

TOP: Group photo of IllumiNative Design Lab participants  
 BOTTOM: Native youth brainstorming during IllumiNative's Design Lab  
 PHOTOS: COURTESY OF RYAN REDCORN (TOP) AND CNAY (BOTTOM)

# CREATIVE NATIVE CALL FOR ART 2019



**ARTIST NAME:**

AYDRIAN D.

**AGE:** 9

**TRIBAL AFFILIATION:**

HOCHUNK, OJIBWE, ODAWA, BODEWADMI, & LAKOTA

My art piece is a lane stitch style beaded cuff and earrings set. I call it "Galaxy" because it looks like the Milky Way and all the stars in the sky. It's made of my Mom's leftover beads, she said there's beads in there from my Grandma and Great Grandma too. I grew up knowing I belong to an awesome strong culture. We are the future and with our art we will make our people even stronger! "Galaxy" represents all our ancestors and it's cool because I used 4 generations of beads just in one piece.

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**GLOSSARY**

**Human trafficking** is "the exploitation of a person typically through force, fraud or coercion for purposes such as forced labor or commercial sex, and it involves vulnerable populations including Native Americans."<sup>1</sup>

**Trust and Treaty Obligation** refers to the federal government's responsibility "to protect tribal treaty rights, lands, assets, and resources, as well as a duty to carry out the mandates of federal law with respect to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages."<sup>2</sup>

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## CHAPTER 3

Education  
and Jobs

2019 Generation Indigenous Youth Summer Networking Reception

PHOTO BY: CNAY

BIE schools have a graduation rate of **53%**.

The national average is **80%**.

**E**ducation of youth has always been essential to the indigenous peoples of the United States. Ties between youth and elders were often formed and strengthened through teaching. With the onset of non-indigenous education methods, such as the forced assimilation through boarding schools, the traditional ways of educating children shifted. Unjust education policies lead to the graduation rate for American Indian/Alaska Native students being the lowest among all ethnic groups at a rate of 69 percent.<sup>1</sup> Further, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools fare even worse with a graduation rate of 53 percent.<sup>2</sup> The national average is 80 percent.<sup>3</sup> Re-envisioning education with a Native lens can transform a student's learning and life trajectory. Education is one of the most critical ways we can push back on the effects of colonial policies. Today, youth call on peers and policy makers to recognize culture and history when looking for solutions to this issue.

## Native Cultures in Schools

One of the ways Native youth are working to reimagine education in the context of their cultures is with policies that support wearing traditional regalia for milestones like high school graduation. In North Dakota, the passage of Representative Ruth Buffalo's House Bill 1335 allows students to wear eagle feathers and plumes during important educational ceremonies like high school graduation. These policies reaffirm the identity of Native youth and set the precedent of culture being celebrated and encouraged, rather than prohibited and hidden. For Charitie Ropati, Yupik, of the Native Village of Kongiganak, changing the Western standard of education for Native youth is imperative. She says, "I am tired of learning in an environment that continues to not acknowledge the atrocities Indigenous peoples have faced. This is the reality of Western education. It dehumanizes the narrative of Indigenous peoples and doesn't acknowledge the resiliency and diversity of Native culture. In order to fully



2019 Champion for Change Charitie Ropati at her high school graduation

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHARITIE ROPATI

counteract this issue, a course curriculum that is accurate and focuses on the Indigenous perspective is crucial, and our native youth should be allowed to wear their regalia when graduating. We have been conforming to western standard over the course of 12 years, and it is only right to end high school in our Indigenous regalia.

In their fight for self-determination, indigenous people have advocated for the removal of mascots that portray Native people or elements of Native cultures. These mascots perpetuate harmful stereotypes of indigenous people and contribute to a narrative that fuels racism and hate crimes. Between 2008 and 2018, there were at least 52 incidents of race-based harassment directed at Native American athletes, coaches, and fans. The vast majority of these incidents occurred in high school sports.<sup>4</sup> Only 15 of the 52 incidents resulted in an apology to the victims. Research shows that race-based mascots are associated with negative stereotypes of indigenous peoples, and incidents of racism in sports has increased over the years.<sup>5</sup> Thus, significant action is needed to continue the removal of mascots, symbols, and logos that are based on race. Many schools across the country have already implemented policies to remove these mascots; however, more work is required to ensure that students do not have to navigate a school environment that does not support them in this way or, at the worst, is hostile and degrading. Students should not have to endure school environments where their identity is portrayed in a way that leaves space for others to mock and ridicule them. If students did not have to endure this, it could help them feel more comfortable and accepted in their schools, as if they belonged and their identities were affirmed, rather than misconstrued.

Additionally, some schools have adopted policies that allow for students to participate in hunting and fishing trips by designating these as excused absences. Moreover, schools that adjust their calendars in consideration of seasonal hunting and fishing activities make it easier for students to be involved in these cultural practices. These are important steps in encouraging youth development and connection to culture without the risk of falling behind in school. Such activities also help build the knowledge of the student with regard to sustainability and environmental matters. There are also opportunities for educators to complement curriculum with indigenous practices such as intergenerational approaches that bring elders into the education of younger generations.

Native youth have a meaningful role in shaping the future of this country and also in leading Native cultures, traditions, and governments into the next generation. As the late Wilma Mankiller, former Principal Chief of the Cherokee

Some schools adjust their calendars in consideration of seasonal cultural activities to encourage youth development and connection to culture.

Nation said, “Whoever controls the education of our children controls our future.” One’s education forms their development, their character, and their future; thus, it is vital for Native youth to lead the movement in reforming our education systems.

## Language Learning



Elyssa Sierra Concha teaching children in her classroom at the Red Cloud Indian School in Pine Ridge, South Dakota

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ELYSSA SIERRA CONCHA

Native youth are driving a nationwide movement to revive their tribal languages. The incorporation of indigenous language instruction into curriculum has the power to transform Native students’ relationship to their culture and ensure that their language is sustained for future generations. When Native languages and cultures are integrated into academics, students often exhibit higher educational outcomes and increased engagement in their learning.

Across the country, schools have initiated successful language learning efforts. Increase in Native participation and control of their own education programs has been very effective for places like

Pine Ridge, South Dakota where the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation partnered with the Red Cloud Indian School to offer a Lakota language-based immersive elementary education.<sup>6</sup> Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa (Elementary School) empowers children to take classes in math, reading, science, culture and other areas in a fully Lakota-speaking setting. Through this program, youth are able to connect with their culture while also preparing for their futures.



Elyssa Sierra Concha, Lakota Language Immersion Kindergarten Teacher

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ELYSSA SIERRA CONCHA

Elyssa Sierra Concha, Oglala Lakota, is a graduate of the Red Cloud Indian School and has returned to her community in Pine Ridge to continue the revitalization of the Lakota language as a kindergarten teacher. Elyssa says, “I want the students I teach to look at me and see a young Lakota person fluent in our language and proud to speak it. It wasn’t too long ago that Indigenous children were beaten for speaking our language and practicing our ceremonies was illegal. Now my students are growing their hair long again, speaking our language, and have never experienced feeling ashamed for being Indigenous.

That's why I do what I do, so that this upcoming generation of leaders won't have to struggle with healing our people. They're being raised in a nourishing environment where our language and way of life is celebrated and normalized. I'm choosing to dedicate my life towards revitalizing our language and healing so that there are less battles for our children to face."

In addition to the work on the ground in Indian Country to revive languages, there is also policy work and legislation at the federal level to ensure the preservation of these languages. The Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Act ensures the "survival and continuing vitality of Native American languages" through funding that supports the restoration and revival of Native languages.<sup>7</sup> This legislation enabled tribes across the country to preserve their languages. In 2019, Senator Tom Udall introduced the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act that would extend funding and increase eligibility for smaller programs that may currently lack the number of participants as required by the law. This federal support of tribal-driven work to maintain and revitalize Native languages helps to safeguard the future of Native languages and cultural traditions. Lauren Hummingbird, graduate of Tsalagi Tsunadeloquasdi (Cherokee Immersion School), testified during a hearing of the bill, saying, "Supporting cultural education and growing the language curriculum will help the children succeed on their lifelong journey and allow them to reach their God-given potential in school, in life, and as Native speakers."<sup>8</sup>

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*Supporting cultural education and growing the language curriculum will help the children succeed on their lifelong journey and allow them to reach their God-given potential in school, in life, and as Native speakers.<sup>8</sup>*

— LAUREN HUMMINGBIRD

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## Innovative Workforce Development

The journey from education into the workforce should incorporate resources and support for youth. Stable employment with adequate pay helps put young people on a path toward self-reliance and a better position for future success while also increasing access to higher education. As part of a larger movement for tribal self-determination, workforce development is one way in which tribal communities can build prosperity. As citizens contribute to the economic and sociocultural life of their community, their work benefits their nation and future generations. Much of the activity around developing a strong workforce in Indian Country is not tied to notions of unemployment rates and job retainment: rather, it focuses on creating opportunities for success and creative avenues for preparing and supporting workers. Workforce development for Native people should be advancing self-sufficiency through meaningful jobs that help workers and their families.

The Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) in Arizona sought to mitigate its unemployment rate of 30 percent and poverty rate of 52 percent through the development of a robust, skilled workforce.<sup>9</sup> The tribe used the Career Pathway approach to design a community-based workforce development system that is specific to the community's needs as well as the short-term and long-term priorities of the workforce, the employers, and the tribal nation. The GRIC system connects job skills training, education, academic and career counseling, and continued support of participants throughout their careers. Their policies also simplify the path from a work placement to permanent employment, easing the burden on employers in the hiring process.

A key element of the program is the commitment to culturally-relevant training through the inclusion of cultural values and stories into courses, consistent consultation with the community's Council of Elders on curricula, and education of non-community faculty members about Gila River's culture and the learning styles and challenges for Native students. This holistic, community-oriented program invests in the growth and development of its community members and enables them to achieve individual success while also building the local economy. It is vital for workforce programs to build capacity locally so that community members can professionally contribute to their community without having to leave home in order to do so.

In order to strengthen the ladders of opportunity for youth and for tribal communities to flourish, the development of the workforce must be prioritized.



# SPOTLIGHT

## Qaneryararput Yugtun Piniqerput/ Qaneryararput Cugtun



The annual First Alaskans Institute's Elders & Youth Conference brings together just under 1000 participants to develop the leadership skills of Native youth and strengthen youth with knowledge, experience and wisdom of Native Elders. This year's conference was held in Fairbanks, and for many young participants, the conference was their first opportunity to attend a statewide gathering where they were able to engage in meaningful dialogue on issues that Alaska Natives face. Youth and Elders network with national and state organizations as well as individuals who are making positive impacts on indigenous communities through both Native traditions and modern technology.



This year's conference theme was: Qaneryararput Yugtun Piniqerput, in Yup'ik, and Qaneryararput Cugtun Kayuq-erput, in Cup'ik. Roughly translated into English, it means language is our superpower. CNAY has presented at the conference for the past two years and this year, our session focused on "Intergenerational Coalition Building", which shared ways indigenous communities create pathways for intergenerational learning, both in Alaska and in national programs. In an intimate setting, we learned from each other and realized the need for a community of practice for inter-generational learning. In visiting with community members, we learned "the best classroom is at the foot of an elder".

TOP: Sam Schimmel and Nikki Pitre at the 2019 Elders and Youth Conference  
BOTTOM: First Alaskans Institute 2019 Elders and Youth Program Cover  
PHOTOS: CNAY (TOP) AND FIRST ALASKANS INSTITUTE (BOTTOM)

Even more, the programs that support working people should be culturally informed and grounded in the values of the community it is meant to assist. In the annual Generation Indigenous survey of Native youth, the Center for Native American Youth found that 85% of respondents said they want more internships, apprenticeships, training programs etc. in their community. The formation and continuation of programs and policies that support youth in these professional endeavors are imperative in elevating the next generation of leaders and their communities.

## Community Wealth Building

Through community wealth building, tribes are able to exercise their sovereignty in developing opportunities within their communities. Community wealth building is a strategy that uses a range of methods and avenues to build local wealth through asset-building and the anchoring of local jobs in low-income communities. It strengthens individuals and communities through democratic ownership and control of business while utilizing local talent, capacities and institutions, and creating locally-owned family and community-owned businesses that are loyal to geographic place — businesses that do not leave the community.<sup>10</sup> It focuses on establishing a collaborative, inclusive, sustainable, and locally-controlled economy. This economic strategy values and relies on the old ways of reciprocity, connection, and collective responsibility for well-being.

The increase of local wealth is brought about through the development of cooperatives, employee-owned companies, social enterprises, community land trusts, family businesses, community development financial institutions (CDFIs) and banks, and many more. A cohort of Native communities based in Minnesota, South Dakota, Oregon, and Washington set out to ground wealth in their Tribal communities by learning about community wealth building and eventually launching enterprises in their communities. Both urban tribal communities and communities on reservations can use this strategy to improve financial security and stability among their people.



In Portland, Oregon, the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) developed a holding company that oversees their organization's for-profit social ventures, such as the Native-owned microenterprises they support.<sup>11</sup> They are shifting toward a network of employee-owned businesses in their community. Further, they have initiated an Individual Development Account (IDA) program that offers people with a low-incomes a way to build financial security through a matched saving program.<sup>12</sup> This innovative program encourages people to save and build assets by purchasing a home, starting a business or other pathways to financial security.

Families and communities that hold assets are better positioned to withstand financial or economic shocks and exhibit greater resiliency in handling financial downturns. In addition, they are better equipped for future planning and security in funding college education, retirement, and other investments. More than a job, assets and wealth provide deeper stability. Thus, community wealth is essential for the overall development and trajectory of Native youth. In order for families and communities to control their economic destiny, there is a great need for policies and programs to uplift these endeavors.

# CREATIVE NATIVE CALL FOR ART 2019



**ARTIST NAME:**

SKYE (LENAE)

**AGE:** 17

**TRIBAL AFFILIATION:**

NAVAJO

Being Native American, my culture is the most important thing to me. Although, looking at how much society has changed over the years, it's easy to feel disconnected and alienated from my traditions. Especially being part of the Native youth, I feel a pressure to keep my culture alive. In my picture, I wanted to show that we don't have to keep our modern interests and our traditions separate. We should learn to keep a balance of the two, and respect both. You can see in my picture, that I wanted to show my Navajo culture and my interests together.

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## CHAPTER 4

# Sacred Sites, Lands, and Waterways



Youth and Staff of Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project

PHOTO: COURTESY OF NUESTRA TIERRA BOARD MEMBER, GABE VASQUEZ

**C**onnection to land and geographic place have always held deep significance in the traditional ways of Native peoples. As these natural spaces and resources face ongoing threat of destruction and contamination, Native people also continue their centuries-old push for their rights to their sacred land to be acknowledged and respected. Youth recognize that the issue of a changing climate is increasingly urgent, and they are determined to defend the land, water, and sacred sites that are at risk from climate change. Across the nation, Native youth are leading movements to protect sacred sites, fight climate change, and reignite the power of traditional ecological knowledge. Through this work, youth are reclaiming and decolonizing land while also revitalizing and reconnecting with traditional ways of living in connection with the natural environment.

## Climate Change in Indian Country

Across the globe, there is a growing urgency to address and mitigate climate change. For Indian Country, the danger of a changing climate has already arrived and will persist unless significant action is taken to reduce the harmful impacts of climate change. Native youth play a critical role in the movement of addressing climate change by bringing their voices, knowledge, and action to local, national, and international discourse.

The disparities that exist for Native people in areas like educational attainment and employment also exist in the realm of negative environmental impacts. There is a clear disproportionate impact experienced by indigenous peoples, particularly regarding catastrophic environmental events like wildfires, flooding, drought, and heatwaves. A recent study found that Native Americans, when compared to other ethnicities, are more likely to reside in areas with the highest potential for wildfires and have the lowest capacity for response and recovery.<sup>1</sup> In California, tribal communities experience the harmful effects of climate change through frequent and severe wildfires that result from high temperatures and limited rainfall in forests.<sup>2</sup> Heat, drought, and fires like this put people, animals, and food sources at risk. These environmental hazards also put a greater burden

on tribal nations to ensure the wellbeing and safety of their people. Traditionally, outbreaks of fire have been limited by prescribed burning; however, indigenous people are not allowed to burn public land as that task can only be performed by federal or state agents.<sup>3</sup> Long-fought issues of self-determination arise in this issue of land management, and it is vital to consider Native knowledge and practices as solutions for a changing climate.

Caressa Nguyen, a member of the Lone Band of Miwok from California, is committed to restoring, reclaiming, and protecting her ancestral homelands in California. California indigenous peoples have relatively little land in trust and many tribes are still fighting for recognition, making access to land a major issue that prevents the land from being properly tended, cultural materials from being accessed; and for young people, relationships with the land to be cultivated. To address this issue, Caressa founded a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, *Sacred Lands, Native Hands*, whose mission is to restore ancestral homelands to the hands of original peoples and educate stewards for traditional stewardship, protection, and perpetuation of a regenerative future. Caressa's 501(c)(3) aims to be a bridge between land holders and the traditional stewards of lands. She says, "Wildfires are especially rampant in California because we have been unable to tend to the land in the ways that it needs. If we are to protect land and populations from wildfires, indigenous peoples must be on the forefront of preventative efforts."



Caressa Nguyen  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF CARESSA NGUYEN

Meanwhile, tribes in other parts of the country are experiencing much different, yet still damaging, impacts of climate change. In the Midwest, historic floods have struck several reservations and left Native people without power, potable water, medical services, and access to food.<sup>4</sup> Three tribes declared a state of emergency in response to this immobilizing influx of water that has submerged roads and left dozens trapped in their homes. These weeks of prolonged flooding cause economic suffering that can require months of recovery.

There is a serious current — and future — threat of tribal communities once again having to endure forced relocation from their homeland. Some tribes have already had to relocate due to the severe effects of a rapidly changing climate. For example, the tribal community of Newtok has moved from their village in Alaska to another village across the river due to erosion of the permafrost that acts as the base of their village. Temperatures in Alaska are rising at an alarming rate, and research shows that 86% of Alaska Native villages are susceptible to harmful effects of climate change like erosion and flooding; even more, 31 of the villages qualifying for relocation.<sup>5</sup> When considering the framework and

precedents for relocation of indigenous people, it is imperative to consider the historical context of forced relocation and to place an emphasis on self-determination of tribes.

The pattern of Indian Country being hit hardest by catastrophic weather events causes significant acute and long-term risks to the wellbeing of Native youth. The tribal community of Pine Ridge in South Dakota was one of the most severely impacted communities by flooding in the Midwest in 2019, yet citizens maintain that government assistance was inadequately slow to arrive and there is a general sense that people outside of Pine Ridge are uncaring toward their suffering. For places like Pine Ridge, where a disastrous collision of nature and poverty has resulted in multiple deaths during the 2019 floods, more must be done. Climate change has deeply-rooted and far-reaching impacts — there are threats to livelihood, economies, agriculture, hunting and gathering, fishing, forestry, energy, recreation, and tourism. The inadequate ecological protective measures combined with lack of disaster recovery capacity hugely impacts current Native people and future generations; thus, political action is needed to ease the disproportionate impact felt by Native people. Native youth continue to work on the ground and in governmental spaces to ensure that their voices are being heard and that they are part of the larger movement to address the climate crisis.

## Protecting Sacred Sites to Preserve Culture

Tribes are distinct entities, yet share common values such as a connection to land. Some revere land and uphold certain sites as inextricably bound to their beliefs and practices. Indigenous people have endured an ongoing fight for their right to access and utilize lands as they see fit, and this fight continues today. Recent battles involve the protection of Native land from hazardous industries as well as the right to have protected access to sacred sites. For many indigenous peoples, freedom of religion is tied to the protection of sacred sites, yet recent actions threaten both.

In Arizona, protesters have fought the use of treated sewage water to create artificial snow for a ski resort on a mountain that is held sacred by several tribes. Navajo and Hopi people view the mountain as "indispensable to their religious beliefs and practices."<sup>6</sup> Yet, the desecration of this land with snow made from wastewater sullies the spiritual nature of the landscape and inhibits their ability to collect flora and fauna used for religious rituals as well as plants used in

# SPOTLIGHT

## Ursus Alaska



Sam Schimmel, owner of Ursus Alaska, is innovating business opportunities with Alaska Native Corporations. Building lasting relationships that have positive economic impacts for Alaska Natives is one of Sam's priorities. Firmly built on a commitment and understanding of the importance of Native lands and natural resources, Ursus Alaska strives to responsibly connect visiting families and groups with the unparalleled wilderness in remote Alaska. Leasing Native land and promoting responsible use and partnerships brings much-needed resources to Native communities.

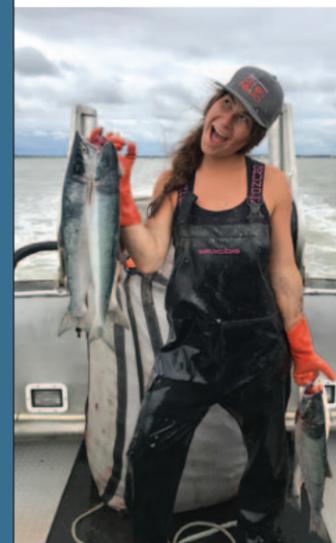


PHOTOS: Sam and Jeremy Schimmel  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF URUSUS ALASKA

healing practices. When the resort opened, police blockaded the mountain and would only allow those with an access pass to enter; meanwhile, protesters gathered in prayer at the base of the mountain. The leader of the demonstration, Ray Ray, asked "Am I not allowed to pray and go to the sacred mountain that my ancestors and that my people have been praying to long before this was considered America?"<sup>7</sup> Scenarios of similar magnitude have played out in the movements to protect Chaco Canyon and Bears Ears National Monument.

The justice system's history of devaluing sacred site protection stems from the United States courts' failure to acknowledge the unique nuances of indigenous spiritual and religious practices, practices that are often inherently different from western religions that lack such site-specificity. Religious freedom claims hold political and moral weight, yet protection for sacred sites lacks the corresponding significance in court. The clear regard for seasonal recreation and business development over the rights of Native people to freely practice indicates that more must be done to preserve sacred sites, thereby aiding in preserving the cultures of various tribal communities.

## Sanctity of Environmental Education



Deenaalee Hodgdon fishing  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF DEENAALEE HODGDON

Indigenous people have relied on traditional ecological knowledge for centuries. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is the ongoing accumulation of environmental knowledge that Native people have collected over years of observing and interacting with the environment. Environmental education through a Native American lens has the capacity to preserve culture and utilize this traditional knowledge to inform others and contribute to policy action. For example, the U.S. National Park Service has initiated work with Native people to learn about TEK through different methods such as interviewing, mapping, and focus groups. In order to protect sacred lands and fight against climate change, there must be more dialogue between traditional and contemporary environmental approaches.

A large part of this traditional ecological knowledge is tied to the land, and indigenous youth are working to strengthen the connection among the land, people, and traditional land-based practices. Deenaalee Hodgdon, a Deg Xit'an Athabaskan, Yupik, and Alutiiq youth, seeks to increase representation of Indigenous people on the land through traditional practices such as hunting, fishing, gathering, Native games, backcountry hiking, climbing, skiing and other forms of outdoor recreation. Deenaalee sees this work, and the presence of Indigenous bodies on the land, as a form of resilience, resistance, and resurgence. Deenaalee says, "(Re)establishing our relationship to the land for urban and rural Indigenous peoples is intrinsically tied to mitigating the impacts of climate change. By building healthy, resilient communities through outdoor activity, we empower leadership within each other to strategize how to move forward in this time of climate instability and learn to adapt to a shifting environment together." In addition to working to increase viability of activity on the land, and Arctic climate resilience, Deenaalee commercial and subsistence fishes in her home region of Bristol Bay where she helps to protect the last wild salmon run from the proposed Pebble Mine.



*(Re)establishing our relationship to the land for urban and rural Indigenous peoples is intrinsically tied to mitigating the impacts of climate change.*

— DEENAALEE HODGDON

PHOTO: COURTESY OF DEENAALEE HODGDON

## Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project

The Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project is a non-profit organization based in southern New Mexico that engages Hispanic and Latinx youth, families, and local leaders in cultural outdoor education, conservation advocacy, and policy development. Led by a board composed entirely of people of color (POC), the Nuestra Tierra team and its volunteers focus on restoring traditional and cultural teachings to outdoor recreation and outdoor learning by focusing on the indigenous traditions and roots of mestizaje. Recently, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation provided support for Nuestra Tierra leaders to take more than a dozen youth from the southern Ysleta del Sur Pueblo on a weekend trip of camping, fishing, and archery in the Valles Caldera to join other indigenous youth from Jemez and Santo Domingo Pueblos. The youth had an opportunity to share stories, enjoy time camping, fishing, telling stories around the campfire, and sharing their culture and language with each other. Because the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo was fragmented from the northern Pueblos (it is located near El Paso, Texas), it was many of the youth's first time to meet other Pueblo youth. The weekend outing ended with breakfast at the home of the Jemez Pueblo Cacique.

PHOTOS: Youth participating in Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project's activities  
PHOTOS: COURTESY OF GABE VASQUEZ

It is clear that when discussions take place and decisions are made regarding the environment, that indigenous people need to be at the forefront of these conversations. The impact of heritage cannot be undervalued in this space since indigenous peoples have relied on this detailed traditional knowledge in order to survive, often placing high stakes on the reliability and accuracy of the knowledge. TEK provides innovative methods of ecosystem management, conservation, and restoration — all of which are vital elements in a world with a changing climate. In addition to withstanding the test of time, TEK is sustainable and cost-effective. Recognition of the deep value of traditional knowledge can lead to a dynamic interface between TEK with modern scientific methods that would foster a shift to a more ecologically and culturally sustainable world.

There is a strong need for a platform to connect this knowledge with modern scientific information for decision-making in environmental matters, particularly climate change adaptation.

Congress is working on the RESPECT Act, introduced by Representative Raul Grijalva of Arizona, that seeks to require "federal agencies to have a process to ensure meaningful and timely input by Native American tribes before undertaking an activity that may have substantial direct impacts on the lands or interests of the tribes, on the relationship between the federal government and the tribes, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities between the government and the tribes."

Acts like this are a step in the right direction in offering a platform that seeks input of indigenous people on matters that affect them. As climate change becomes more severe and more sacred sites are at risk, Native people want respect for their traditional knowledge and oral histories in consideration of proposed policies and plans.

The diversity of tribal ecological wisdom and practices, acquired through years of practices, beliefs, and varied interactions with the natural world, must be acknowledged by larger efforts to address climate change. Native youth are actively contributing to this effort through their dedicated learning and perpetuation of their ancestors' knowledge and practices.



# CREATIVE NATIVE CALL FOR ART 2019



**ARTIST NAME:**  
VALERIE W.  
**AGE:** 15  
**TRIBAL AFFILIATION:**  
LAKOTA AND DINE

As a Native American teen living in the modern world, I often feel alone and different. I am one of only a few native students at my school. This makes it important for me to represent my native culture and traditions, I come from two tribes, Lakota and Dine, and being native is an important part of my identity and who I am. Native dance is one way I share my traditions and share my culture with others. I count because I am the next generation of native people and I am a future tribal leader.

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## GLOSSARY

**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."<sup>1</sup>

**Traditional Ecological Knowledge** is "a cumulative body of knowledge, practice and belief evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment."<sup>2</sup>

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## CHAPTER 5

## Citizenship



2018/ 2019 Generation Indigenous Movement Builder Fellows on Capitol Hill

PHOTO BY: CNAY

**C**ulture has been, and always will shape the concept of citizenship for Native peoples. As American Indians and Alaska Natives, who are citizens of both Tribal Nations and the United States, citizenship is not only a civic identity with the US, it also represents a centuries-long battle for sovereignty as well as a powerful symbol of belonging to their indigenous culture. Native youth have ignited movements and brought their voices to critical discussions that affect the country. They are exercising civic engagement. Youth are running for seats on their tribal council and state government positions; and organizing to help elect the first-ever Native women serving in elected offices. Indian country is alive with the power to strengthen culture and re-envision democracy in the United States. Native youth are impacting governance and representation through advocacy on issues including increasing voter turnouts, protesting against borders, and working to ensure an accurate count of Native people in the 2020 Census. We recognize that civic engagement is interwoven with a relentless desire for representation and justice; throughout this chapter, these values are expressed through their work as citizens of their tribes and citizens of the United States.

### Making History: Political Representation and Voting

In 2018, Deb Haaland, Laguna Pueblo, and Sharice Davids, Ho-Chunk Nation, broke records by becoming the first Native women ever elected to Congress. This victory had Native women and girls across the country taking notice; for the first time, they saw women like them win their congressional races and serve their people on the national level. Haaland and Davids were among a record number of indigenous women running for office including: Paulette Jordan, Representative Ruth Buffalo, and Lieutenant Governor Penny Flanagan; these leaders prove to countless youth that there is a place for indigenous people in federal government, and that their voices are needed to move this country and their Nations forward.

Representation matters. In 2019, CNAY Youth Advisory Board Member and 2018 Champion for Change Isabel Coronado, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, was selected to develop progressive policy in criminal justice reform at a think tank called Next100, as a Policy Entrepreneur in New York City. At Next100, Isabel is focused on creating policy aimed at reducing the Native incarceration rate in Oklahoma and generating resources for children of incarcerated parents on the federal level. With an extensive background on the incarceration crisis and the impacts it has on indigenous families, Isabel has a powerful narrative which shapes her advocacy efforts. Isabel says, "After the election of the first Native women in Congress, Native youth are feeling increasingly inspired to be in the policy space. At all levels- federal, state, city or tribal — youth all over are using this historical moment to create change. And that is what inspires me every day."

Last year, there were many key races in areas with large Native populations, and there was an upsurge of indigenous candidates on ballots across the country. The Native vote is young, growing, and should not be underestimated. Native people have the political power to influence election results, thereby influencing significant policy action. However, people living on reservations often face barriers to voting such as living far from a polling location and limited access to transportation. Mail-in ballots are rarely utilized because some tribal members live in rural areas that don't have physical addresses, and some must travel a far distance to the nearest a post office box. In the face of challenges to voting rights by way of requiring residential information (street names, house numbers, etc.) that people on reservations often lack, Native youth showed up in waves and voted at their polling stations, resulting in record turnouts across the country. On the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota, dozens of Native youth protested disenfranchisement by marching in the frigid cold to their polling

location on Election Day. In response to these threats of voter suppression, some precincts on the Turtle Mountain Reservation reported the highest number of voters ever recorded.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the two counties in North Dakota with the most Native Americans reported their highest voter turnout since 2010.<sup>2</sup> Actions like these show the depth of passion in young Natives for having their voices heard and being persistent in protecting their rights.



Native Voices Network singing the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Honor Song in front of a detention center in McAllen, Texas

PHOTO BY: CNAY

Young people are eager to make change in their communities, and this is clearly demonstrated through their active participation in civil discourse and their demand for an end to the under-representation of Native Americans. Indigenous trailblazers are paving the way for Generation Indigenous to harness their passionate energy into becoming the transformational leaders of today and tomorrow.

## Borders

In the 2018 State of Native Youth Report, youth shared how the United States' Southern and Northern Borders impact the lives of indigenous peoples. Tribal communities that straddle the borders between Mexico, the United States, and Canada must wrestle with the implications of colonial power that has separated tribal members and put them through challenging processes in order to navigate what many Native activists refer to as "an imaginary line."<sup>3</sup> Because of this, it is vital that Native youth, their families, and their communities are centered in discourse and policy-making around border patrol and border security. Though there are significant challenges to overcome in bringing about a more just and honorable system regarding immigration and borders, Native youth overcome all of this and stand up to advocate for better conditions and policies.

Furthermore, indigenous youth stand in unity in belief that families should not be separated as they seek refuge in the United States. In October 2018, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) adopted a resolution supporting the need to protect the human rights of immigrants. NCAI called for the President of the United States to "immediately end the detention of children and ensure that immigrant families who have been separated are reunited."<sup>4</sup> Indigenous peoples, largely from Central America, are disproportionately represented in immigration and face a myriad of challenges as they enter the United States.<sup>5</sup> Some estimates report that, of those crossing the border, approximately 40% speak an indigenous language.<sup>6</sup> Many indigenous migrants do not speak Spanish or English, so they are more likely to experience human rights violations as well as barriers in accessing healthcare, social services, and other areas.<sup>7</sup> The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) asserts the rights of indigenous peoples to not be subject to acts of violence, including "forcibly removing children of the group to another group."<sup>8</sup> However, since migrants are categorized by nationality rather than tribal affiliation, it is simple to disregard the standards and rights outlined in UNDRIP as well as other international standards.<sup>9,10</sup> Native youth recognize these issues and are calling

Of those crossing the border, approximately **40% speak an indigenous language.**

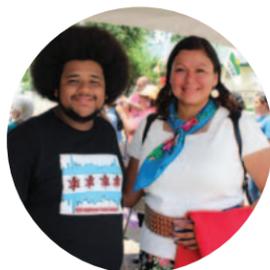
on the United States government to provide a more just system of immigration processes for indigenous people. The collective action of indigenous peoples has historically brought about important, life-saving change, and it is vital that Indian Country continue to act and stand with all indigenous peoples.

“Taking a Stand on Our Stolen Land” was a demonstration and rally organized by the Native Voice Network and the Carrizo/Comecrudo Tribe of Texas on traditional Esto’k Gna territory, near the McAllen Border Patrol Processing Center. The demonstration was part of a weekend-long convening of Native people who gathered in ceremony, rally, strategic meetings, and other events to protest the treatment of neighbors migrating from the south. Citing the forcible removal and displacement of indigenous peoples from their homelands and family separation policies, Native youth at the rally actively resisted these policies in protection of people crossing the border and amplified the need for policy change. Representative Ruth Buffalo of North Dakota spoke at the rally, saying, “We must continue to stand together against corruption and against greed. But most importantly, we need to have consultation with our Tribal nations, we need to have Tribal consultation. We need to tell our true history. If we do not acknowledge the blood that has been shed on this land, we will continue to see genocide.”

Convenings and actions like this, where Native people of all ages gather in response to injustice, show how youth are taking a stand and are passionate about advocating for their rights and the rights of all indigenous peoples.

## 2020 Census: Native Youth Count!

Looking forward, 2020 will be a pivotal year for Native communities to push for positive change, to elect political officials that genuinely serve Indian Country, and to be accurately counted in the Census. In 2020, the largest count of people in America will take place through the Census. The information gained through the US Census is hugely critical to all levels of government and serves as the foundation for policy action that will shape the next decade and can influence lives for years. Data from the census is regularly used by numerous people for planning and decisions in areas such as funding for public services, physical infrastructure like roads and schools, education programs, health services, business development, and many others.



CNAY Youth Advisory Board Member, Anthony Tamez with Representative Ruth Buffalo (ND)  
PHOTO BY: CNAY

AI/ANs were **undercounted by 4.9%** which was over twice the rate of the next closest racial/ethnic group.

The importance of ensuring a complete count of people cannot be understated, especially for tribal communities that are often undercounted. AI/ANs are the most undercounted of all racial/ethnic groups on the Census.<sup>11</sup> In 2010, AI/ANs were undercounted by 4.9% which was over twice the rate of the next closest racial/ethnic group.<sup>12</sup> Native people are referred to as “hard-to-count” (HTC) with regard to the Census, and one in three Native Americans lives in a HTC Census tract.<sup>13</sup> This is because of financial poverty, young age, remote location, limited internet access, longstanding distrust of the US government, and others. Natives living on reservations or in Alaska Native villages face even more risk for being undercounted.<sup>14</sup>

Seth Damon, Navajo Nation Council Speaker, told the LA Times, “For the Navajo Nation and Indian Country, the Census determines whether your dirt roads get graveled or paved, or whether your people move from dirt floors to a solid foundation.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, it is imperative that Native youth are aware of the importance of the Census and can help ensure that the people around them — their family members and community members, are being counted.

The United States uses Census data to distribute over \$675 billion dollars across the country to programs and services like education, housing development, job training, and healthcare services for seniors.<sup>16</sup> For tribes, the funds that support Indian programs for education, health, the environment, housing, and economic development are all distributed based on data from the Census. Therefore, if communities are undercounted, they receive less of the funding they are rightfully owed. As demonstrated during the government shutdown in January 2019, a lack of funding pauses critical resources in Indian country and places an undue financial strain on tribal communities. During the shutdown, Native people experienced a significant burden as the US failed to carry out its trust obligations to tribes during this time. Many tribes rely on federal funding for daily operations, and when those funds are not received, it strains programs like food assistance and healthcare services.<sup>17</sup> All of these things are detrimental to the prosperity of Native youth and represent the importance of being counted and receiving adequate funding from the federal government.

Additionally, community organizations use Census data to decide where programs and services (such as childcare centers and summer meal programs) are most needed, and businesses use the data to make choices about where to open or expand their businesses — these include things like factories, shopping malls, banks, etc. These upsurges in business development can increase available jobs and financial stability of the area as well as overall community wellbeing.

# SPOTLIGHT

## Young River People's Council: Get Out the Vote

The Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community's Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) and Salt River's youth council, the Young River People's Council (YRPC), participated in Get Out The Vote efforts. Leading up to Election Day, youth were involved in phone banking and voter registration drives within the Salt River community. On Election Day, OCLA and Salt River sponsored an Election night event where people were entered into a raffle when they showed their "I voted" sticker. The YRPC were the emcee's for the event and part of their program was sharing the history of Native vote in Arizona. Youth also used their social media platforms to encourage voting and were able to enter voters into a raffle contest. Additionally, youth in after-school programs created signs for Election Day.

TOP: Youth in after school programs in Salt River made signs for Election Day.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MIKAH CARLOS

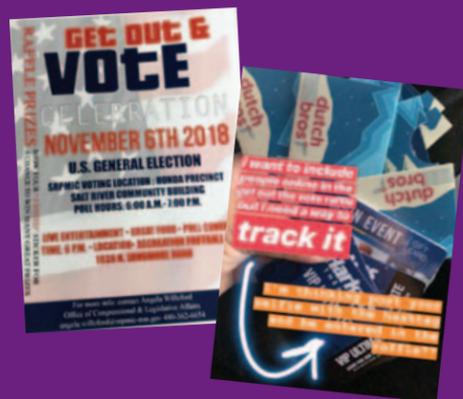
MIDDLE: Members of Young River Peoples Council hosting Kids Vote booth.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MIKAH CARLOS

BOTTOM: OCLA provided non-partisan info sheets, refreshments and limited number of shirts for voters.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MIKAH CARLOS

RIGHT: Election Night event flier and Social media post for raffle.



which communities within the district are authentically represented, and what policies are supported and passed. Additionally, Census data is used to ensure compliance with the Voting Rights Act, for things like providing language assistance services to Native voters as well as enough polling stations. Thus, a full count is greatly needed to ensure an equal voice for Native people in the United States's political processes.

These factors are vital to ensuring a just, fair representation in the United States for Native people. As we mentioned earlier in the chapter, representation is critical for a number of reasons. Native youth recognize the importance of getting a full count for the Census and are doing their part to make this happen. As Austin Weahkee (Cochiti, Zuni, and Navajo), 2018 Generation Indigenous Movement Builder Fellow, says, "The Census applies to everything from broadband access to determining if you have to drive 4–5 hours or drive 30 minutes to get to your local precinct." Additionally, he says, "We have a consistent undercounting, probably about 5% of the community is undercounted. That affects who you get to vote for. Here in New Mexico, we see a lot of our districts are really split up, so we aren't able to make a concerted effort to elect Native American officials to public office." Austin encourages youth to get involved through jobs with the Census Bureau, saying this is a good way to help out the community and he says, "Even though the Census seems like a huge undertaking on the large scale, it's actually really simple to make an impact ourselves. Just fill out the form, open your door to enumerators, and try to make sure everyone around you gets counted. This is how we stand up to oppression, through the Census."

Increased opportunities, improved funding for programs and services, and economic development all aid in advancing our goal to create a world where it is simple for Native youth to live full, prosperous lives.

The Census is also important to government officials since it is used to set the number of Congressional seats per state, allocate electoral votes, and to redraw district lines to reflect the population. The 14th Amendment requires congressional districts to have approximately equal numbers of people, and the data from the Census is what officials use to draw these districts in a way that is meant to be representative and fair. The way districts are drawn has a huge impact on voters and politicians, because it influences who wins elections,



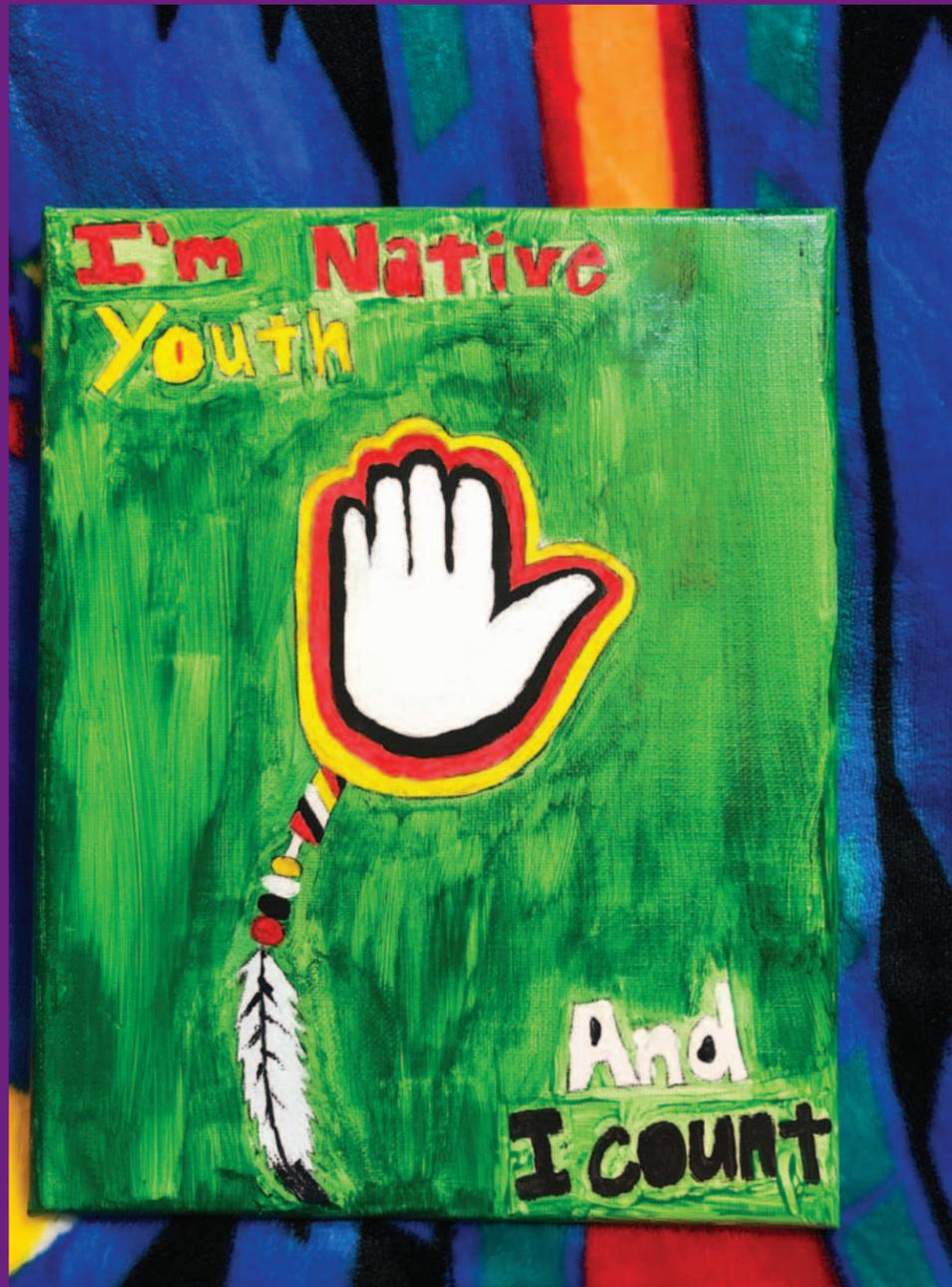
*The Census applies to everything from broadband access to determining if you have to drive 4–5 hours or drive 30 minutes to get to your local precinct.*

— AUSTIN WEAHKEE

PHOTO BY: CNAY

A full count of Indian Country will help indigenous communities hold their government officials accountable to the needs of their community, and Native youth are the forefront of ensuring these rights are met through civic engagement and political participation.

# CREATIVE NATIVE CALL FOR ART 2019



**ARTIST NAME:**

CHEYENNE F.

**AGE:** 17

**TRIBAL AFFILIATION:**

JENA BAND OF  
CHOCTAW INDIANS

The main message of the painting is that no matter what age, or what size, we as native youth have a voice. We were put on this planet to care for Mother Earth, this explaining the background color choice.

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## GLOSSARY

**Tribal Consultation** "is a process that aims to create effective collaboration with Indian tribes and to inform Federal decision-makers. Consultation is built upon government-to-government exchange of information and promotes enhanced communication that emphasizes trust, respect, and shared responsibility."<sup>1</sup>

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