

## NATIVE YOUTH RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) at the Aspen Institute is a national advocacy organization that works with Native youth—ages 24 and under—in urban, rural and tribal reservations and communities across the country to improve their health, safety, and overall well-being. We believe all Native youth deserve to lead full and healthy lives, have equal access to opportunity, draw strength from their culture, and inspire one another.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, CNAY created a Call for Native Youth to share what they are doing.

### WE ASKED YOUTH THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- What advice or encouragement can you share with Native youth?
- How are you staying safe?
- What are you feeling?
- What is your community doing to stay healthy?



"As Native youth, we must step up to care for our Nations in a way that is absolutely needed. **I am reminded that together we are innovative, resilient, and most of all, we always lead with our heart.** Reaching out to our networks and resources during this pandemic is essential to caring for our communities," - Shandiin Herrera, *Navajo Nation*, CNAY Youth Advisory Board Member & 2019 Champion for Change

"I am creating a productive space to do college from home without distractions by building a schedule that works best for me, but **still making sure I have time for family and fresh air.** I also have been working towards revamping my room in a way that feels open and bright since I am spending so much time alone with a computer,"

- Jaidyn Probst, *Lower Sioux Indian Community*,  
*Generation Indigenous Ambassador*



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"As we begin to adjust our communities and individual lives towards the future of social distancing and quarantining to combat COVID-19, it's important to understand and **continue the work of being a member of your community** that ensures its connection to land and expand your knowledges of a place," - Owen Oliver, *Quinault (Chinook) & Isleta Pueblo*, CNAY Youth Advisory Board Member & 2020 Champion for Change.



"Even though there is a lot we do not know during this scary time of COVID-19, **I do know that no matter what happens next, our staff will make sure our kids are taken care of,**" Natacha Messerly Doney, *Blackfeet Tribe*, English Teacher at Hays Lodge Pole School.

"During this very chaotic time for my community, **I wanted to share some calmness in the safest way possible.** I did this by giving fresh filleted fish to elders in our village. I kept my distance and had a designated drop off area," - Shavaugna Underwood, *Quinault Indian Nation*, CNAY Youth Advisory Board Member & 2020 Champion for Change.



"It is so important to both take the time you need to slow down and yet still maintain movement. Take time to **think of new ways** to move your **body, challenge your mind, pray, and engage in meaningful conversation with loved ones,**" -Michael Charles, *Navajo Nation*, 2018 Generation Indigenous Movement Builder Fellow.

"I want to take this time to simply pray and hope we all get better in every way possible...**I am catching up and restoring my traditional roots and teachings** such as beading, sewing, speaking our language and simply just smudging," - Sparrow Littlelesky, *Sorey Nakoda & Oglala Lakota*.



"I have been actively involved in emergency response efforts here on our Nation to help ensure our communities safety and well-being during these trying times, especially as of last week we have had a confirmed case of COVID-19 on our Nation.... **It will take us all** to get through this, whether it's helping out in your community, tending to family members, or practicing social distancing, **we all have a role to ensure our community wellness.**" - Rory Wheeler, *citizen of the Seneca Nation*, CNAY Youth Advisory Board Vice Chairman.



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"As a student nurse, I have been involved in **educating our community about the COVID-19 pandemic** to decrease fear and promote safe practices. In the hospital, I have **taught** patients **preventative self-care measures, warning signs and symptoms**, and community resources aimed at helped those impacted by COVID-19," - Felicité Robichaux, United Houma Nation



"**Dancing is a big part of my life.** As a jingle dress dancer, it is important to remember why you dance. It is a **healing dance, a medicine dance**, and it's the responsibility of the dancer to know in times of need to **share these prayers with the people**," - Dominique Lombardi, *Wanikik Cahuilla from the Morongo Band of Mission Indians.*

"I was always taught that you offer Ta'dadíín or Náádáálgai bee sodilzin abinígo because jóhonaa'éeí nít íídóoltah. **I offer my thoughts/prayers to Mother Earth, Father sky, Diné bikéyah, and my people** so that we all will remain **healthy**. I hope you all are **safe, protected**, and practicing the necessary precautions to **keep this sickness away**," - Roger Beyal, *Navajo Nation, Generation Indigenous Ambassador.*



"With this pandemic hitting so close to home and essentials being scarce at the grocery, **I have researched and harvested traditional foods my ancestors ate.** For example, rabbit, acorns, sand plums, and water crest. When the weather is nice, I go out and I dig into the earth and plant vegetables. I am so glad I live in the countryside. If I want to go for a walk or have a breath of fresh air, I am able to do so," - Elizabeth Sate Day, *Kiowa and Kiowa Apache.*

"Since COVID-19, some of our tribal youth and tribal member's have come together to **provide meals for all of our elders.** We have curb side service and we delivered to those who don't feel comfortable getting out of there house. We also go grocery shopping for the elders. With true help of donators, we have come together to **make care packages for our elders**," - Kassidy Talbot, *Chitmacha Tribe of Louisiana.*



"I have been working to keep our community safe. Recently I worked to **bring supplies to elders in our community.** I have been working as a member of the international Arctic Observing Summit to highlight the intense burden Covid-19 places on rural Alaska Native communities... **There has never been a more relevant and necessary time for there to be a national Native network to connect, communicate, and share resources among our peers and communities**," - Samuel Schimmel, *Kenaitze/St. Lawrence Island Siberian Yupik CNAY Youth Advisory Board Member & 2017 Champion for Change.*



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"I am trying to **stay positive** by remodeling my room to create a better workspace for things I still need to do for work and school. A good thing about being back home is being able to **help my parents** with things around the house, like cleaning and hanging up some dried seal meat my dad just caught hunting. In general, I am trying to **channel my energy towards things that are in my control**,"- Helen John, *Yup'ik & Inupiaq*, CNAY Intern and NAPLP Spring 2020 Cohort

"Living in a rural community, it is difficult to access healthy, nutrient-dense foods. Due to the pandemic, our nearest grocery stores are still getting ransacked and items are being hoarded, forcing our rural communities to pick from the scraps. Although I'm not able to make monetary contributions to elders and families who are struggling during this time, I can **use my fishing skills to help put ancestral foods on the table**. In an effort to help alleviate fears of food scarcity, **I am fishing for e numudooe**. I made my first round of trout deliveries yesterday- fresh, gutted and cleaned," - Autumn Harry, *Numu & Diné*, Generation Indigenous Ambassador



"During this time of physical distancing, I'm finding that **having a routine and keeping active** have not only helped **maintain a healthy body**, but a **healthy mind** as well. Once this is over, I refuse to start from square one when it comes to my training for lacrosse. It's important for people to stay within their homes and **practice physical distancing**. I'm taking this time to **re-evaluate my goals** and what I can better do to achieve them," - Enahaogwahs Schindler, *Cayuga Nation and Wolf Clan from Six Nations of the Grand River Territory*