

# NATIVE YOUTH ARE MEDICINE

The State of Native Youth Report 2020



CENTER FOR NATIVE  
AMERICAN YOUTH  
AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

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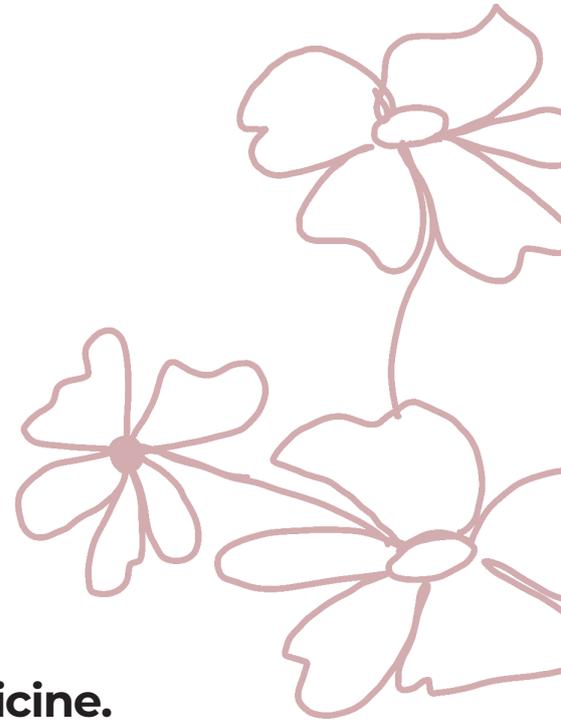
It is important to acknowledge the complexities of identity. This report uses the terms Native American, Native youth, and Indigenous interchangeably.

Results from the Indigenous Futures Survey (in collaboration with the University of Michigan, University of California Berkley, IllumiNative and the Native Organizers Alliance) indicated diverse preferences to their identification. Participants of the survey report identifying as Native American (94%), while others stated that either 1) they prefer another term or 2) they are another Indigenous group.

CNAY chose to not standardized identity through a single label, but rather encouraged each author to identify themselves.



# 2020 STATE OF NATIVE YOUTH REPORT



## Native Youth are Medicine.

*Center for Native American Youth, "Native Youth are Medicine: The State of Native Youth 2020," State of Native Youth Report, Washington, DC Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, November 2020.*



*Sweet Medicine Child. 2020.*

### About the Artist

**Tvli Birdshead**, *Cheyenne Arapaho, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Oglala*

"I'm a sophomore at IAIA, working towards my Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in Studio Arts, and plan to work with Native Youth in my community afterwards. My work is both a reflection of my life and what it means to me to be Two-Spirit. Due to the effects of colonization, I have felt unaccepted and disregarded by my own family. To help heal others, I utilize many creative platforms by making videos, digital works, paintings, and drawings. Through my artwork, I aspire to help heal others from the physical, mental, and intergenerational trauma my viewers have endured."

### About the Art

This digital artwork titled, Sweet Medicine Child, made using Procreate, depicts a Two-Spirited boy wandering around campsites at his Sundance, connecting with the land, and brings a flower to show his relatives. Surrounded by the billows of smoke from smoldering medicine, he is at peace and happy. Upon his head is a halo made of sweetgrass and sage. The Arapaho word "ni'óxu," meaning sweetgrass, is a form of utilizing and revitalizing language. I wanted to portray how important the upbringing of Native Youth is. As long as Native youth live and breathe there is strength, resilience, and there is resistance.

# ABOUT CNAY

## THE CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH

The **Center for Native American Youth** (CNAY) at the **Aspen Institute** is a national education and advocacy organization that works alongside Native youth—ages 24 and under—on reservations, rural, villages and urban spaces across the country to improve their health, safety, and overall well-being. All Native youth deserve to lead full and healthy lives, have equal access to opportunity, draw strength from Native culture, and inspire one another. At **CNAY**, this is achieved through empowerment and culturally competent methodologies including leadership, youth-led policy agenda, and youth-led narrative.

By supporting youth-led and community driven initiatives, **CNAY** continues to build a network of Native youth leaders. Through hands-on trainings and technical assistance, **Generation Indigenous**, **CNAY Youth Advisory Board**, **Champions for Change**, and other platforms, **CNAY** continues to evaluate and develop our programming through Indigenous methodology.

## 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 undertake 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. In addition to the Washington, DC office, The Institute has campuses in Aspen Colorado (Ute territory) and New York (Munsee Lenapee). The Aspen Institute and its international partners promote the creation of a free, just, and equitable society in a nonpartisan and nonideological setting through seminars, policy programs, conferences, and leadership development initiatives.



Image Bank USA.



# Land Acknowledgement

This report was written on the traditional territories of:

- Nacotchtank (Acostian) & Piscataway
- Shoshone Bannock & Coeur d'Alene
- Yakama Bands of Pshwánapum & K'titaas
- Shakori, Eno & Catawba Dena'ina
- Kumeyaay Nation
- Kickapoo, Peoria, Potawatomi & Myaamia
- O'odham & Akimel O'odham
- Snohomish, Tulalip & Co-Salish

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The **Center for Native American Youth** would like to thank **Isabel Coronado, Sam Schimmel, Autumn Adams, Kendra Becenti, Cassandra Granville** and **Joeseeph Boland** for their research, support and writing this report.

A special thank you to the dedicated CNAY team for their expertise guidance, including **Nikki Pitre, Dr. Billie Jo Kipp, Lia LaCour, AC Locklear, Jen Peacock, Jarrette Werk,** and **Kyra Antone.**

Appreciation to **Michael Woestehoff** of Ellsworth Consulting, the graphic designer of the 2020 SNYR.  
A special thank you to **Anthony Tamez-Pochel** and **Paulette Jordan** for writing our report forewords.

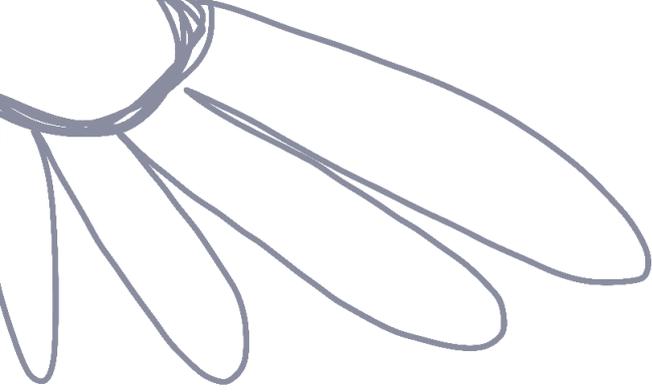
This report centers on a single truth, Native youth are medicine. Thank you the **CNAY Youth Advisory Board** for their continued guidance, and to all of the youth we have worked with who lead our work.

This report would not have been possible without the support of **W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Casey Family Programs,** and **Annie E. Casey** and their commitment to uplift Native American youth.

A special thank you to the **2020 Creative Natives** whose art is showcased throughout the 2020 State of Native Youth Report.



*Anthony Tamez-Pochel*



# We Cannot Do This Alone.

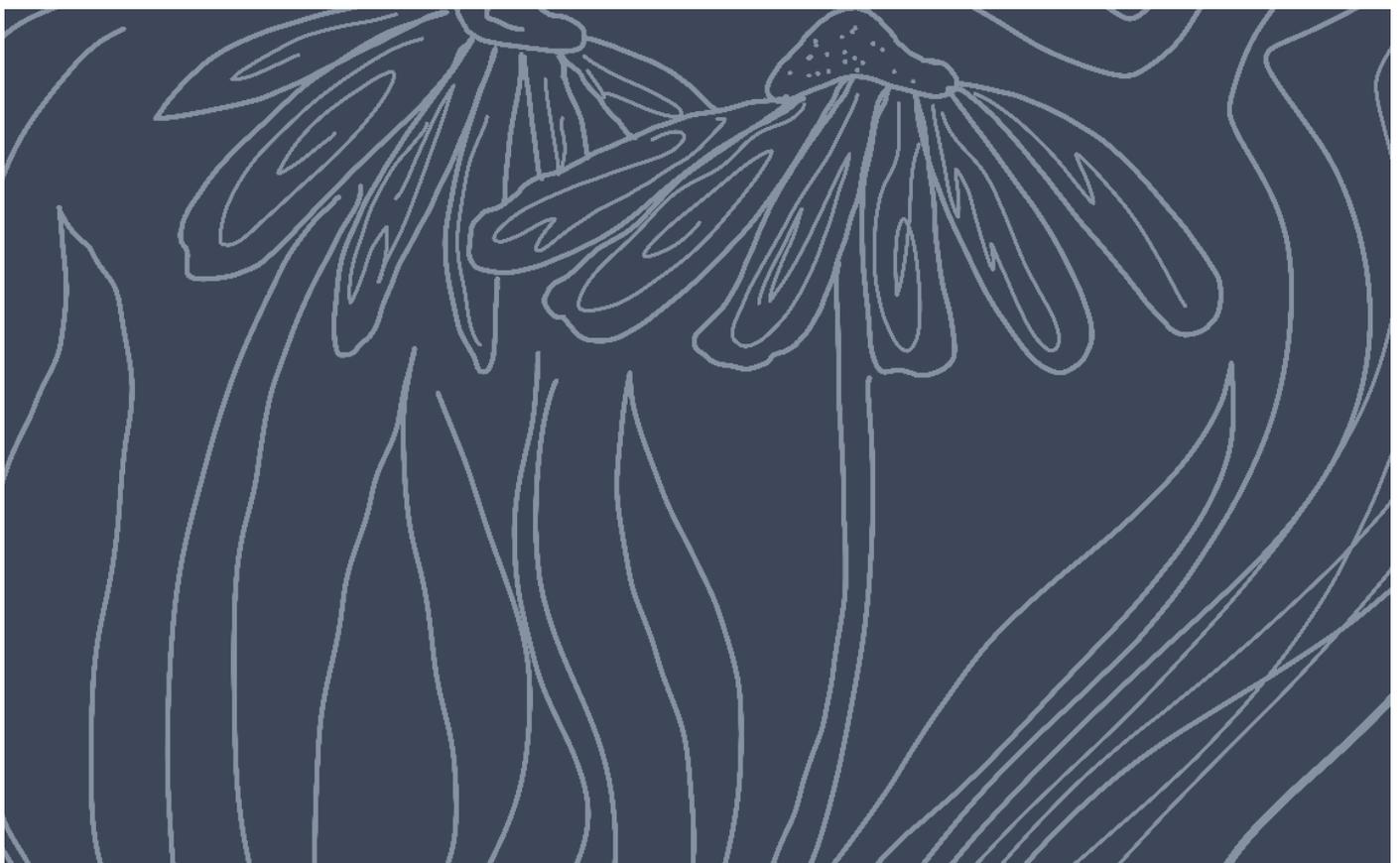
## We are at an inflection point in our country.

"... The young people are the ones who most quickly identify with the struggle and the necessity to eliminate the evil conditions that exist." -**Malcolm X**.

The evils that exist in this country are ones Native American people, especially Native American youth are unfortunately all too familiar with; from the desecration of sacred sites to the attack on tribal sovereignty. This is the year for us to act, for us to practice our culture a little harder, for us to assert our treaty rights more aggressively, and for us to live

healthy and safe lives as resilient and thriving Native American peoples. 2020 is the year of exposure, the year where the undeniable systematic racism in our policing systems came to head, the year we saw a surge in white supremacy, but 2020 is also the year we've seen the coalition of Black and Indigenous solidarity fighting for collective liberation.

Here in Chicago, there was a removal of several racist monuments, a direct result of solidarity and youth organizing. On July 17, 2020, I joined my Black and



Indigenous relatives for a demonstration. Like we have seen throughout the rest of the nation, this peaceful rally ended in youth like myself being victims of police brutality and racially charged violence. We gathered for prayer, with water and feathers, and were met with pepper spray and batons by gun holding authority. According to the **Justice Department** findings "The department found that Chicago Police Department officers' practices unnecessarily endanger themselves and result in unnecessary and avoidable uses of force. The pattern or practice results from systemic deficiencies in training and accountability, including the failure to train officers in de-escalation and the failure to conduct meaningful investigations of uses of force." As a nation we need to rethink where we invest, why not that investment be in our communities?

Within the following days of the rally, Chicago's mayor announced the creation of a **Memorials and Monuments Assessment Project** devoid of any youth organizer voice or perspective. The exclusion of youth voice continues on reservations, rural, villages, and urban spaces across the country which is why now more than ever we need organizations like the **Center for Native American Youth** that draw strength from Native culture and inspire one another. This is achieved through empowerment and culturally competent methodologies including leadership, youth-led policy agenda, and youth-led narrative.

The legacy of the **Center for Native American Youth** will be seen in future generations. As they build and uplift future tribal leaders, policymakers, and agents of change. Native Youth like **Owen Oliver** (Quinault and Isleta Pueblo) who are leading the way on Indigenous education through community engagement and empowerment; **Mikah Carlos** (Onk Akimel O'Odham, Tohono O'Odham, and Piipaash) who empowers youth in her community and amplifies youth-led and cultural solutions; **Isabel Coronado** (Mvskoke) who is a policy entrepreneur at Next100 creating policy aimed at

reducing the generational cycle of incarceration; and myself, I know the medicine I carry and I work tirelessly to have equity for Native people in the city of Chicago and beyond. All youth from across the country are rising to fight and eliminate the evil conditions that exist in our country in their respective communities.

Throughout this year's State of The Native Youth Report you will see highlights from the **Indigenous Futures Project**, a first of its kind survey created by Indigenous People for Indigenous People that gather and disseminate critical information and strategies about the priorities and needs of the Indigenous population in preparation for the 2020 election. Who would've thought if you ask Native youth their policy priorities it'd laid out and upfront? The report includes calls for actions to bring equity for Native youth. Importantly, despite our communities being disproportionately affected by COVID-19, it's Native youth who are keeping their communities safe and taking care of loved ones and this report highlights this. For the first time, young people have authored chapters in this report. We continue to raise issues that are important to us as Native youth: Citizenship, Education & Jobs, Health & Wellness, Land Waterway & Sacred Sites, and Systems Impacting Youth. We need to push for better policies for the betterment of all of our relatives.

As a Black and Indigenous youth, I am beyond exasperated. I am exasperated of continued forcible removal of Native people from ancestral lands. I am exasperated to see authority openly support white supremacy. I am exasperated to see our country continue to protect statues of figures that sought to eradicate an entire race of people. I know I am not alone in this feeling. Relatives, we need to come together. We are at an inflection point in our country. We invite you to join us in supporting youth led movements and youth led racial justice. We cannot do this alone.

*Written by Anthony Tamez-Pochel.*





Gianni L. (Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation) Description: For me, wearing my beadwork is like wearing armor on a battlefield. It brings me protection and tranquility. In this painted image, the medicine wheel presents itself behind a young Native woman wearing a matching beaded earring and necklace set. It is to represent the strength that beadwork carries when preserving mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health



*Paulette Jordan.*

# Defining Our Path.

## **Native youth are the future bearers of culture and tradition, and future tribal and community leaders.**

The series of events we've recently experienced have taught us that we, as Native people, need to prepare for the many challenges facing this world. Independence and freedom are our continuing aspirations. The truth is that the solutions to today's world problems lie in our diversity. Resilience is embedded in the Native American youth experience and this provides Native Youth with a unique perspective of the world that empowers them to enact change in their communities. In this age of technology, our youth are incredibly well-educated with access to the data and resources needed to effect change. Now is the time to learn from Native youth, amplify their voices, and join Native youth as they work to improve our country and the world.

Throughout the State of Native Youth Report, we see young Native leaders setting the example for building relationships across nations and communities, taking a stand against

wrongdoings, and strengthening our cultural foundations to adapt and innovate in this ever-changing world.

The impacts of colonization, disenfranchisement, and assimilation policies have worked to silence our voices and make us invisible. The historical relationship between the government and Native peoples has created a great deal of mistrust among many tribal communities and has caused our people to disengage from the political system. Yet, we are able to overcome the erasure of our history and culture, destruction of our lands, violations of our treaty rights, and suppression of our right to vote.

Our ancestors understood that one's actions will have an impact on the next seven generations. We have a responsibility to participate in the decision-making that will affect our culture, our way of life, and our youth. We cannot disengage; we are the new ancestors and whether we are aware



of it or not, we hold generational knowledge, not just generational trauma.

I am encouraged by the spirit of awakening that is taking over this country. Millions of Americans are taking to the streets to stand up for racial, social, and environmental justice. Among them are thousands of Native youth. This new generation of young Native activists are integral to our country's movement for healing, empowerment, and justice. As highlighted throughout this report, Native youth are lending their voices to issues impacting Indigenous communities worldwide. Through their activism, Native youth bring issues such as the desecration of sacred lands, climate change, Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP), and race-based mascots to the national and global consciousness.

We need people to make their voices heard outside of government buildings, demanding accountability. We also need people elected to the seats inside those buildings, representing the people's voice. It is critical to have Native American representation at the state and federal levels. We know the critical issues facing our communities, and we must be the ones to protect what we hold sacred—Mother Earth, health and wellness, housing, education, and most importantly, our children.

The Indigenous voice in all areas of leadership is long overdue. Our country and our world have much to benefit from it. At the same time, women must step into the highest leadership positions. In Indigenous communities, women have been leading for centuries, as matriarchs of our people, as chiefs. Not only will we get to the top leadership positions in the country, but we will pull others up behind us. It is imperative that our people, especially our youth, understand that we belong in these spaces—because this is and will always be our home.

We cannot let our young Native leaders fight these battles alone--we need to meet these young changemakers where they are with everything that we have. Native youth are the future caretakers of this Earth, the future bearers of culture and tradition, and future tribal and community leaders. As you review this report, let the voices of our youth speak to you, uplift you and push you to fight for the change that will dramatically improve Native youth's lives and ensure a bright future for the next seven generations and beyond.

*Written by Paulette Jordan.*

# THE AS



**“My grandmother always said, ‘You will always fight. The next generation will have to hold the line and fight for the same things. I am always going to continue that legacy of fighting for freedom, peace and justice. I think it’s a good thing for me to work internally to try to make things better.’”**





# Native Youth Rising

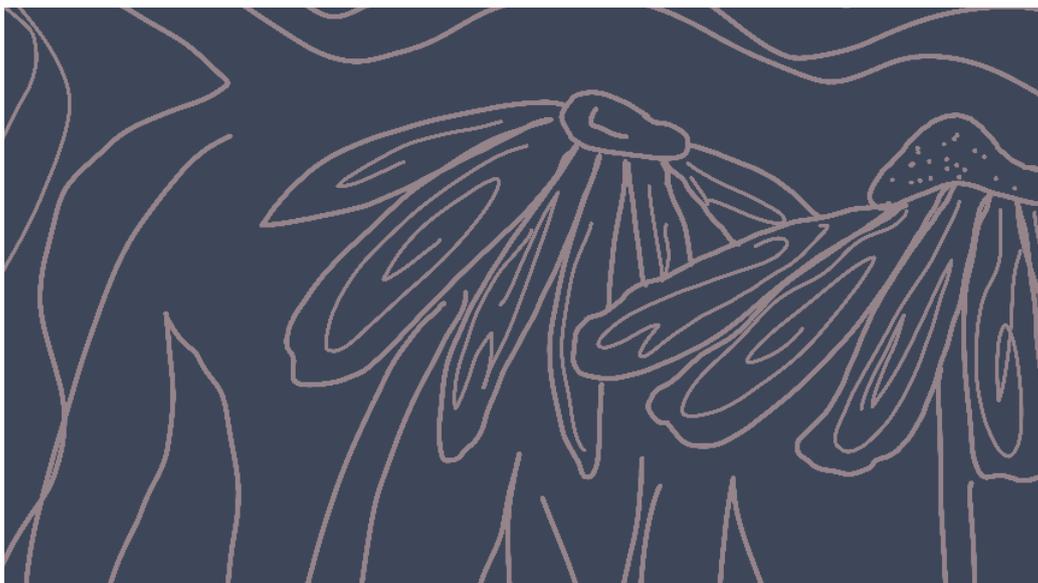
**This year's State of Native Youth Report supports Native youth narrative and visibility.**

*Marimtsutn khwhe s'wi'wi'nu'mt'msh.*  
Native youth are medicine. Despite numerous adversities this year, Native youth have seized opportunities and laid the groundwork for a more inclusive, equitable, future. This year's State of Native Youth report demonstrates the various ways young people continue to lead in fighting for a world they wish to live in. Native youth are medicine.

From the open letter our Youth Advisory Board sent to the NFL reminding Commissioner Goodell that Native American youth live and thrive beyond any caricature or stereotype to **Muscogee Creek** youth leader **Nancy Deere-Turney** sharing optimism after the Supreme Court's ruling in **McGirt v. Oklahoma**; from **Katherine McCleary**

reminding us that the **Little Shell Tribe** gaining federal recognition is just one part of their long history of resistance and survival to **Generation Indigenous Ambassador Roger Beyer** advocating that the census is a way to show that we will not be forgotten and the resilience of our ancestors will remain for the future generations to come; from being at the forefront of addressing racial unrest to protecting the health and safety of their communities amid a global pandemic—Native youth have risen to today's challenges.

This year's State of Native Youth Report supports Native youth narrative and visibility. Recognizing that CNAY was created to serve a platform to give youth agency in sharing their narrative, grow in



leadership, and build power to better their communities, this year's State of Native Youth Report is proud to have youth-authored chapters. We are incredibly grateful for this year's authors:

- **Kendra Becenti** (Navajo), who speaks of the **Indigenous Futures Survey**, Native youth civic engagement and reminds us that we must always empower youth to use their voice for the betterment of our people. In the Health & Wellness chapter we read of healing, trauma-informed care and honoring culture and tradition, Native youth are amplifying the wellbeing of their communities.
- **Isabel Coronado** (Muscogee Creek) shares how Native people have been navigating systems that impact us since the onset of colonization. COVID-19 has only exacerbated disparities within systems. The Systems Involving Youth chapter also discusses how Native youth are advocating to address inequities that our people are part of, whether it's leading campaigns or fighting for better policies.
- **Sam Schimmel** (Siberian Yupik and Kenaitze Indian) authored Education and Jobs. This chapter highlights the value of education for Indigenous peoples, and recommendations for holistic education to ensure success for Native youth. To ensure high quality education, there are many nuances that need to be addressed, and, ultimately, funded. This includes increased federal funding in K-12 schools chartered by the **Bureau of Indian Education** as well as Tribal Colleges & Universities. Additionally, with remote learning, communities need increased funding and access to high-speed broadband and funding for laptops.
- **Autumn Adams** (Yakama) shares with us a COVID-19 policy timeline that highlights the response rate the government had to the pandemic in tribal communities and the United States.
- Additionally, **AC Locklear** (Lumbee), shares the importance youth leading in caring for of Land Waterways and Sacred Sites.

We feature youth throughout this report for the remarkable change they are making to better this world. It is young people that are building a movement that we

will reflect, honor and uplift when these moments are recorded in our history.

Historically, Native people have been easily forgotten and left out of data, written in as "other" or an asterisk, seemingly because our populations are too small to make a difference in our society. This led the **Center for Native American Youth** to partner with **Native Organizers Alliance** and **IllumiNative** as well as Indigenous researchers from the **University of Michigan** and **University of California—Berkeley** for the first of its kind survey that gave Native people the opportunity to be part of shaping our future. Through the **Indigenous Futures Survey** (IFS), Native youth communicated that their top four priorities are improving mental health; addressing violence against women, children, and LGBTQ+ individuals; preserving tribal languages; and caring for their elders. Findings of the IFS are featured throughout this year's State of Native of Youth Report.

CNAY created a webinar series, **Tele-Native Youth**, to serve as a platform for young people to discuss issues they care about. Since May, we have fostered a virtual community for youth to discuss topics such as mental health, mindful movement, connecting to the outdoors, democracy, education, and more. As we continue to grow our reach, CNAY is proud to offer a space for young people to connect in a meaningful way. We invite you to join us for **Tele-Native Youth**, be sure to follow our social media platforms for more information.

This year's report reveals that youth are eager to share their truth, increase visibility, and are actively organizing to create the change they desire to see. We encourage all Native youth to continue to harness your power, harness your medicine. Youth actions assured us that positive change is on the horizon and the Center for Native American Youth will continue to proudly support those actions.

*Written by Nikki Pitre.*



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THE ASP



*Center for Native American Youth's 2020 Champions for Change Public Event.*

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*2020 Indigenous Futures Survey*

The 2020 Indigenous Futures Survey marked an incredible contribution to research by Indigenous people for Indigenous People. Through a partnership between CNAY, the Native Organizers Alliance (NOA) and IllumiNative with the University of Michigan and the University of California Berkeley, Native people were asked for the first time about what issues matter to them. This collaboration brought together powerful and unique expertise and experience in pursuit of narrative change, inter-generational leadership development, organizing and movement building.

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**We  
Count.**

# Citizenship

Indigenous communities have strong, thriving, self-sufficient governments that serve the needs of their people and maintain strong traditional roots and cultural ties. Engagement in all aspects, but particularly democratic and civic participation is an essential practice in many Indigenous communities. A key feature of many Indigenous societies, both historic and present, operate on values of community and collectivity. In 2020, Native youth played a crucial role in making sure Native people were counted, represented in Indigenized data, took to the polls, ran in local elections, and more. This year was particularly marked with incredible achievements and strides to enhance and honor tribal citizenship and sovereignty.

## BUILDING NATIVE POWER

This year marked the largest count in the United States through the **2020 Census**. The information collected throughout the US is critical at all levels of the government and implicates critical policy decisions for the next decade. This data influences communities at all levels, including funding for public services, infrastructure such as roads and schools, education programs, health services, and many others. In 2020, Native youth mobilized to ensure an accurate count to effectively address a history of undercounting.

The historical and intentional undercounting of Native peoples dates back to early census counts, where from 1790 to 1850, Native people were excluded from the first six censuses. However, in 1860, the Andrew Jackson administration mandated that only Native people "who were considered 'assimilated' were officially counted and noted as 'civilized Indians,' in census documents."<sup>1</sup> This historic undercount can still be seen today. In the 2010, the **Census Bureau** estimated that in these communities, Native people in these areas "were undercounted by approximately 4.9 percent, more than double the undercount rate of the next closest population group."<sup>2</sup> Today, despite the importance of the census, many rural Indigenous communities continue to be missed and labeled as "hard-to-count" areas. The inaccurate counting of Native communities leads to inequitable distribution of funding and political representation.<sup>3</sup>

In 2020, Native communities face an even greater risk at being undercounted in the census due to restricted measures because of the COVID-19

# & Sovereignty



Amaia Marcos (Oglala Lakota) commissioned Gear Duran, a well-known Indigenous artist, to create a mural on the Las Vegas Indian Center.



pandemic [see Health and Wellness]. Traditional census outreach practices, such as door-to-door census taking, posed a significant risk to the spread of the virus in vulnerable areas which led to the census primarily being accessed online.<sup>4</sup> However, for about half of the Native population, completing the census virtually was not an option due to limited broadband connectivity access, a 2018 study found.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the **Navajo Nation**, one of the tribes impacted hardest by the pandemic, had a census self-response rate that was just 3% by July 2020.<sup>6</sup> In addition, many Native community members who still speak their traditional languages experienced census accessibility issues. The 2010 census revealed that one in five of Native elders over the age of 65 spoke an Indigenous language.<sup>7</sup> This year, the **Census Bureau** decided to not provide Indigenous language assistance to census, except for the Navajo language, excluding a very important demographic of the Indigenous population.<sup>8</sup> However, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic and constantly fluctuating census deadlines, Native youth remained committed to pathways of civic engagement that are critical to enact change.<sup>9</sup>

#### GET OUT THE COUNT

**CNAY's 2020 Census Campaign**, in support and partnership with the **National Urban Indian Family Coalition (NUIFC)** reached over 17 states and 23 cities through engaging over thirty youth organizers, including youth councils and student groups. In preparation for their census initiatives, organizers attended a culturally designed training to explore the importance of the **Census** and its impacts on tribal communities. This curriculum ensured youth leaders understood the historical implications of being excluded from census participation on local communities. Organizers then mobilized to ensure their communities were counted by implementing community action projects where they received micro-grant funds to design youth-driven campaigns aimed at promoting the census among Native people. CNAY successfully awarded approximately \$60,000 into the hands of youth leaders.



Amaia Marcos.

Native youth were devoted to making sure their communities were counted in the 2020 Census. **Amaia Marcos** (Oglala Lakota) commissioned **Gear Duran**, a well-known Indigenous artist, to create a mural on the **Las Vegas Indian Center**. This 30-foot mural, depicting **Amaia**, promotes census awareness. Titled "Our Voice Matter", was unveiled on **Indigenous Peoples' Day**, October 12, 2020.

**Amaia** hopes that this mural will spark conversations on Indigenous civic engagement, and possible funding to the **Indian Center**. She hopes that it will encourage people in her community to complete the census, become involved, and that it will inspire the younger generations "to really push for environmental, governmental, and tribal sovereignty issues to encourage our people to strive for better life and land back." For **Amaia**, participation in the census means showing the federal government that Native people are still here and are making their voices heard. She says, "if we show that we have the numbers, I definitely think that it is possible for us to influence the country that we dream of." **Amaia's** mural reflects this same sentiment – Native youth need to see themselves reflected everywhere, especially in the census.

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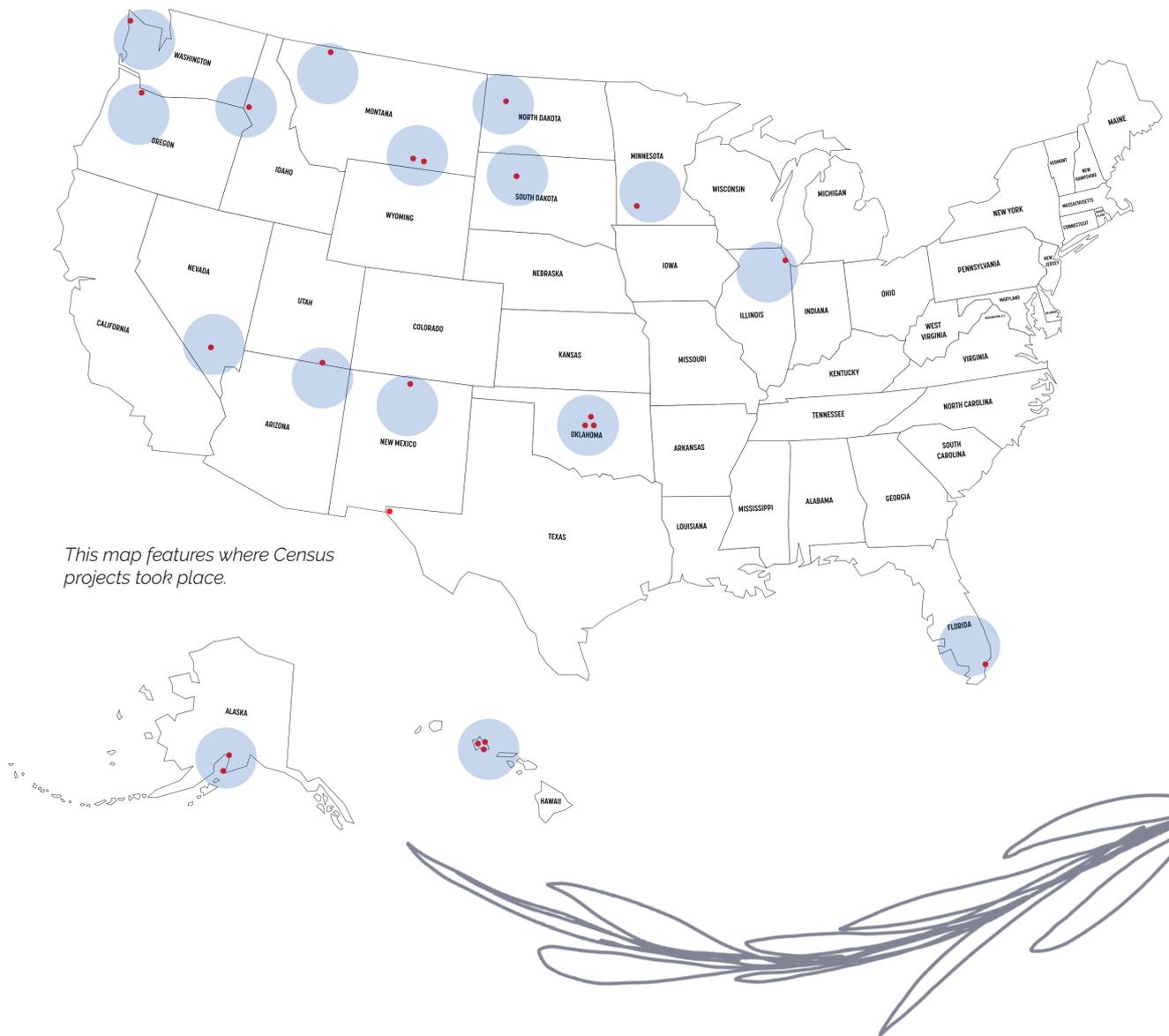
***"If we show that we have the numbers, I definitely think that it is possible for us to influence the country that we dream of."***

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**Jen Peacock**, **CNAY's** Program Associate, said, of the census campaign, that many organizers "took this approach of, 'I need to support my elders in understanding the census and why I need them to take it for me.' I think this has such a tremendous long-term impact on how individuals view the census, despite the many valid reasons of them being uncomfortable with it."

#### STRIVING FOR DATA INCLUSION

Indigenous people have historically been pushed out of research— from their stark undercount in the **Census** to being ethnically misidentified, labeled as 'Other' in national health and demographic data, or listened as an asterisk. This perpetuates the invisibility and dehumanization of Indigenous peoples. This distrust of research and data collection practices is further strained by ethical research violations in the name of 'science,' that often brought little to no benefit to the communities



they were extracted from. Some examples range from forcibly uprooting and severely misusing traditional knowledge, practices, and even blood specimens.<sup>10</sup>

As explained in **Counting a Diverse Nation**, accurate demographic analysis is the precursor to understanding a community's needs and assets. For example, Native people often do not have opportunities to share their tribal affiliations when participating in studies. Native people have distinct tribal affiliations, races, languages and health outcomes that are not always accurately reflected in Western approaches to gathering and analyzing data. Only when the diverse experiences of Native people are understood can research be used to support Native community-driven advocacy. Distrust between researcher and Native community/participant has existed for generations due to the extractive practices of many researchers. In response,

Native scholars and researchers are working to Indigenize and widen spaces within data and research to accurately represent Native people. In 2012, the **National Congress of American Indians** published their **"Walk softly and listen carefully:" Building research relationships with tribal communities**. This report provides a living guide for research in Native communities that is respectful, reciprocal, and responsible. In addition to Native organizations, Native researchers are contributing to stronger research relationships. Another great resource on decolonizing data is the **Urban Indian Health Institute's Best Practices for American Indian and Alaskan Native Data Collection** released in May 2020. By developing culturally relevant, Indigenous-based research models, communities and organizations hope to build Native power via increased Native representation in data.

## INDIGENOUS FUTURES SURVEY



IFS logo

The **2020 Indigenous Futures Survey** marked an incredible contribution to research by Indigenous people for Indigenous People. Through a partnership between **CNAY**, the **Native Organizers Alliance** (NOA) and **IllumiNative** with the **University of Michigan** and the **University of California Berkeley**, Native people were asked for the first time about what issues matter to them. This collaboration brought together powerful and unique expertise and experience in pursuit of narrative change, inter-generational leadership development, organizing and movement building.

The **Indigenous Futures Survey** (IFS), launched in June 2020, sought to amplify Native voices and provide an opportunity for all Native people to be a part of shaping their futures. Inspired by the **Black Futures Lab's Black Census Project**, the IFS aimed to explore; the impacts of COVID-19 on Native families and communities, the impacts of racism and discrimination upon Native peoples' lives and identified Native peoples' priorities for future. By asking Native people ages 18 and older these crucial questions about their experiences, beliefs, and hopes for the future, we are ensuring that Native voices, needs and issues are visible in the American public psyche during a crucial time in this country. As lead researcher, **Dr. Stephanie Fryberg** (Tulalip) explains, "the IFS is important because when Native people are underrepresented in research and science, our voices are not heard. Data speaks loudly whether in congress, a university, or in federal and tribal politics."<sup>11</sup> The results of the survey will help inform advocacy priorities for tribal leaders, policymakers, organizations, and more.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indigenous Futures Project team was not able to engage in outreach to include rural and reservation communities. In order to reach all Indigenous people living in the United States, Native youth, organizers, and leaders were recruited to actively engage Native communities across the country to take the survey. **CNAY** youth leaders from across the

country worked to get the word out to their community about the **Indigenous Futures Survey**. **Hannah Kailimea'u Aiwohi** was born and raised on the island of Maui and wanted to ensure that her community was represented in the IFS. As a Native Hawaiian, she often turns to ancestral knowledge and teaching for guidance and wisdom. Yet, as modern people, the 21st century poses new challenges for Native communities. **Hannah** feels that the IFS is an "opportunity to have direct input on issues that impact our communities. Participating in this survey is important to me personally because I know that having a seat at the table and elevating issues of importance will help to improve the well-being of kanaka maoli and our collective future."<sup>12</sup>

After the survey closed in mid-August, 6,460 Indigenous people representing 401 tribes, villages, and Indigenous communities participated in the IFS. Respondents ranged from 18 to 89 years old and varied in household income, educational attainment, and residence (e.g. small town, reservation, rural/country, and city). Though women-identifying individuals were most represented in the data (75%), those identifying outside of the gender binary made up about 4% of the sample where 13% identified as 'two-spirit.'

The survey yielded fascinating results. When asked what identity labels participants preferred, 68% reported preferring their specific tribe/tribal nation, followed by Native American (64%). "The majority of participants report that addressing issues related to undoing the negative effects of policies and practices that sought to destroy Indigenous communities and revitalizing tribal core values is most urgent."

When Indigenous youth (ages 18-24) asked about their hopes for the future, participants prioritized:

1. Improving mental health (71%)
2. Addressing violence against women, children, and LGBTQ+ individuals (68%)
3. Preserving tribal languages (67%)
4. Caring for tribal elders (61%)

Similarly, Indigenous people overall held the same priorities, but in the following order: improving mental health, caring for tribal elders, addressing violence against women, children, and **LGBTQ+** individuals, and preserving tribal languages. Thus, caring for the holistic needs for everyone in their communities is of most importance to all Native people and was underscored by the IFS.

With COVID-19 and restrictions in place at the time the virtual survey was released, young people worked creatively to ensure older generations were represented.

Personally, I helped my grandmother take this survey. Our conversations sparked a deep reflection about her life. Through this survey, my grandmother shared stories of her childhood including when her parents would talk about the world would change for us as **Diné** people in the future. The **IFS** was an opportunity for youth like me to have conversations with elders about their experiences and what they hope for the future.

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**“Despite historical barriers to voting, Native people of all ages and gender identities are invested in civic and democratic processes and making their voices heard.”**

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Results from the survey provided an opportunity for leaders and policy makers to truly understand the experiences of Native people and their communities. Using these findings, policy makers are more capable of making comprehensive decisions in policy to address disparities felt among the lives and wellbeing of Native people. **CNAY** recognizes the results will serve as a guide in creating a more equitable future for our Native populations.

#### **NATIVE YOUTH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

Evidenced by the **Haudenosaunee Confederacy**, Democratic leadership is characteristic of ancestral Indigenous societies. Considered to be the “oldest, participatory democracy on Earth, the **Haudenosaunee Confederacy**’s constitution is believed to be a model for the American Constitution.”<sup>13</sup> Society under the **Haudenosaunee Confederacy** was also built upon ideals of unity and peace that was free of oppression and class.<sup>14</sup> Democracy and civic engagement have been the life blood of many Indigenous communities for generations.

Historically, however, Indigenous people have often been left out of participating in elections. Until 1924 when the **Indian Citizenship Act** was passed, Native people did not have the right to vote.<sup>15</sup> Yet, Native voter suppression prevented Indigenous people from accessing their right to vote through implementing literacy and “cultural purity tests” and residency requirements.<sup>16</sup> Today, the 2020 **IFS** reported that 77% of **IFS** participants voted in the last local, state, and/or national election. Though the survey did not test what the voting participation was for these elections in isolation, this statistic demonstrates that Native people are politically engaged.

The **IFS** revealed that young people, especially those living on reservations, voted in these elections at the lowest rate. However, this demographic is 1.5 times more likely to experience barriers to voting than older participants, “such as not being able to access polling due to work hours (31%) and not receiving their absentee ballot on time (27%).” Notably, the **IFS** reported that 95% of participants engaged in at least one civic engagement activity (i.e. signing a petition or attending a protest following the murder of **George Floyd**) within the past five years. In addition, among Indigenous trans, non-binary genderqueer and two-spirit youth, there were higher reports of engagement in civic activities. Despite historical barriers to voting, Native people of all ages and gender identities are invested in civic and democratic processes and making their voices heard.

In partnership with the **National Urban Indian Family Coalition** (NUIFC), **CNAY** launched the 2020 **Democracy is Indigenous Campaign** to help emphasize the importance of the Native Vote and to help promote strengths-based narratives in local and national platforms. This campaign mobilizes youth leaders ages 18-24 from across the nation to get out the Native vote in local, state, and federal elections. To achieve this, youth receive custom training that provides skills to enhance community engagement in the face of apathy, microgrant funding, and professional development to create, implement and report on their community action projects.



*Leinani Roylo, Connor, and Koloikeao Anthony.*

**Leinani Roylo** (Kanaka Maoli), **Connor Kalahiki** (Kanaka Maoli), and **Koloikeao Anthony** (Kanaka Maoli) knew they wanted to create an accessible, culturally informed project for the **Democracy is Indigenous Campaign**. **Helu Kanaka**, a website that began as a project to increase census turnout for Native Hawaiians, grew to include voter engagement. By designing informational graphics, encouraging voter registration, and gifting shirts and stickers, they hoped to provide information geared towards their community. “We wanted to influence positive change in Hawai’i through sharing information about civic engagement,” **Connor** explained, “we understand that civic engagement is the avenue



by which we, as the people, can enact change to better our communities."

### **NATIVE YOUNG PEOPLE ADVANCING TRIBAL, LOCAL, AND NATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Leadership is traditional. We are witnessing an increase in Native candidates running for Congress, such as **Kai Kahele** (Native Hawaiian), who is running in Hawaii for U.S. House of Representatives, District 2.<sup>17</sup> In New Mexico especially, there was a Native candidate in every district in the state.<sup>18</sup> Leaders, such as **Deb Haaland** (Laguna Pueblo), **Sharice Davids** (Ho-chunk), **Tom Cole** (Chickasaw), and **Markwayne Mullin** (Cherokee), have paved the way for Indigenous representation in congress. It is our hope that we will continue to see more Native change makers put Native issues and communities at the forefront of democracy.



*Christina Haswood.*

**Christina Haswood** (Navajo Nation) knew she wanted to be a politician when she saw **Rep. Sharice Davids** was elected to the U.S. House Representative. **Christina**, at the age of 26, is running unopposed for the **State House of Representatives District 10** in Kansas, where she has lived her whole life. **Christina** hopes to normalize seeing Indigenous features in positions of political leadership because representation matters. Her platform focuses on policies that build healthy communities and respond to issues facing her state, such as COVID-19, expanding Medicaid, reproductive rights, and protecting lands. As a young leader herself,

**Christina** believes young people should have a seat at tables where decisions are being made for them. "Whatever we vote on is an investment for their future and they're going to have to suffer the results - good or bad," she continues, "as Indigenous people we know what it is like to have our voices silenced or ignored, so I try to make it a point to involve young people as much as possible," which is why **Christina's** campaign staff was all under 30 years old. Christina won her three-way **Democratic** primary with 70.72% of the votes. She will also be the youngest member and third Native person to serve in the Kansas state legislature.<sup>19</sup>



*(Right) Elizabeth Niiqsik Ferguson.*

**Elizabeth Niiqsik Ferguson** (Inupiaq) is running for **Alaska State House District 40** in the 2020 election at the age of 26. Her district represents 23 different Alaska Native communities, equivalent to the size of **Montana**. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching all of these communities to meet voters would be quite challenging. Yet, having grown up in the **Native Village of Kotzebue** in northern Alaska, she says "having someone in office who grew up here, who eats the Native food, who is learning the language, who wears the same regalia, is so important because that's what we're fighting for every day." If elected, she hopes to foster tribal partnerships, promote safe communities, and protect Alaska Native way of life. Her involvement in the community well before running for the Alaska state election gives her immense insight into the needs of her community. **Niiqsik** served as a volunteer firefighter at the **Kotzebue Volunteer Fire Department**, Council Member on the **Native Village of Kotzebue Tribal Council**, and a Director on the **Inuit Circumpolar Council – Alaska Board of Directors**.<sup>20</sup> She is eager to increase Native representation in the Alaska state legislature and will undoubtedly be a voice for her people.



2020 Champions for Change, CNAY Youth Advisory Board & 2020 NCAI Youth Commission with Aspen Institute President and CEO, Dan Porterfield.

## CREATING CHANGE AROUND INDIAN COUNTRY AND BEYOND

2020 was marked by significant events in the fight for treaty rights and tribal sovereignty. **Mashapee Wampanoag Tribe v. Bernhardt** and **McGirt v. Oklahoma** were among the most prominent tests of tribal sovereignty this year. **#LandBack**, a movement focused on restoring stolen lands to Indigenous nations, has gained traction especially in 2020.<sup>21</sup> However, federal systems unfortunately remain one of the few ways tribal governments can maintain jurisdiction over their lands. This continues to contribute to disparities that tribal nations face, such as the over-incarceration of Native people.

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***“Leadership is traditional. We are witnessing an increase in Native candidates running for Congress.”***

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Early in the year, amidst emergency responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of the Interior (DOI) attempted to disestablish **Mashapee Wampanoag** reservation, the first time this has occurred since the termination era.<sup>22</sup> The tribe petitioned the court to “issue an emergency restraining order to prevent DOI from taking immediate action to disestablish its reservation” in **Mashapee Wampanoag Tribe v. Bernhardt**, which allowed **Mashapee Wampanoag Lands** to remain in trust until a formal determination is made regarding these lands.<sup>23</sup>

Spaces that offer opportunities for youth to connect with their cultural identities and engage in leadership practices are ensuring that future generations of Native communities thrive and succeed. The **National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Youth Commission**, designed for youth ages 16-23 who are interested in political leadership, represents the broad interests of Indigenous young people. The commission works with the **NCAI** executive board and staff to make sure that priorities for young Native people are met. They promote perspectives of youth throughout Indian Country by hosting convenings to speak with tribal youth councils and individuals. They are then able to work with policy advocates in congress and organizations to successfully drive Native youth priorities forward.<sup>24</sup> For **Rory Wheeler**, it is important for Native youth to get involved in political leadership and help identify what issues their communities face, how they can advocate to solve some of them, and work to find solutions.

**Rory Wheeler** (Seneca) serves as the **NCAI Youth Commission Co-President** alongside **Sophie Tiger** (Comanche Nation of Oklahoma, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe). **Rory** resides on the **Seneca Cattaraugus Territory** in Irving, New York. He is a **CNAY Youth Advisory Board Member**, and, in addition, he serves as a member of the **Affirmative Action Committee for the New York State Democratic Party**, a **Board Member for the Association on American Indian Affairs**, a **UNITY Peer Guide**, and is active within the **My Brother’s Keeper Alliance** with the **Obama Foundation**. He is currently studying Political Science/Pre-Law and in his community serves as a volunteer firefighter/emergency

medical technician. **Rory** has been active in efforts nationally to bring awareness to Indigenous issues across the United States. He says, "we're still here and we need to be represented."

### MCGIRT V. OKLAHOMA

In July 2020, we witnessed a historic moment with respect to tribal sovereignty. In a 5-to-4 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that much of eastern Oklahoma was indeed **Muscogee (Creek) Nation** territory.<sup>25</sup> In the case of **McGirt v. Oklahoma**, **Jimcy McGirt**, a member of the **Muscogee (Creek) Nation**, was convicted of sex crimes by the state of Oklahoma in 1996. However, since the crime occurred on disputed **Creek** lands, **McGirt** argued this territory was never formally ceded to the U.S. Government, thus transferring jurisdiction back to the **Muscogee (Creek) Nation**. This landmark decision comes over 160 years after the 1856 treaty was signed with the **Creek Nation** that promised "'no portion' of **Creek** lands 'would ever be embraced or included within, or annexed to, any Territory or State.'"<sup>26</sup>

This time, the supreme court decided in favor of treaty rights and tribal sovereignty, which respects tribes' inherent right to self-govern, meaning they have a right to determine their own laws, taxes, and citizenship.<sup>27</sup> Though there remains much work to do in restoring lands and sovereignty to many tribal nations, the Oklahoma ruling offered a strong precedent for the future. For **Nancy Deere-Turney**, 2017 Champion for Change, a member of the **Muscogee (Creek) Nation**, "This decision wasn't about politics. This decision is about right and wrong...I Mvto (thank) the Supreme Court for doing what is right, when history proves they didn't have to."<sup>28</sup>

Jurisdiction over this territory and many others like it remains muddy and complex due to the quasi-sovereign relationship between tribal nations and the federal government. Specifically, major crimes or felonies committed on tribal lands and involving a tribal member or member of another tribal nation, the **Major Crimes Act** exerted federal jurisdiction over these cases.<sup>29</sup> Some have argued that the **Major Crimes Act** has directly influenced the over-incarceration of Indigenous people in federal prison systems.<sup>30</sup> The **2015 Native Lives Matter Report** states that, "Native men are admitted to prisons 4 times the rate of white men and Native women are admitted to prisons to prisons at 6 times the rate of white women." Native youth, who make up just 1% of the overall youth population in the U.S., are heavily overrepresented in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. They make up 70% of incarcerated children and, in 2008, "tribal youth served an average of 26 months under federal jurisdiction, which was more than double the tribal justice system maximum sentence of 12 months."<sup>31</sup> With incarcerations rates incredibly high

among both youth and adults, the risks of having a tribal member in the federal prison system are high.

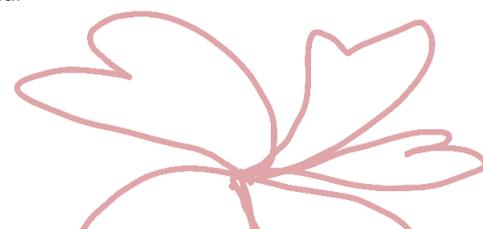


*Isabel Coronado.*

**Isabel Coronado** (Mvskoke (Creek) Nation), **CNAY Youth Advisory Board** member and **2018 Champion for Change**, affirms the Oklahoma Supreme court ruling, but also understands the impacts that this could have on tribal community members in regard to the high incarceration of Native people. To Isabel, "the Major Crimes Act and **McGirt v. Oklahoma** gives the federal government more power to convict our people, therefore having longer sentences, therefore serving in federal systems where they risk being transferred to out-of-state prisons away from their families and communities." In an op-ed she wrote for **Teen Vogue**, she describes how she is working to address mass incarceration of Indigenous people in Oklahoma and the impacts this has on Native children.<sup>32</sup> **Isabel** helped create the **American Indian Criminal Justice Navigation Council (AICJNC)** where she served as deputy director and is currently a policy entrepreneur at **Next100**, a policy think tank uplifting young policy leaders.<sup>33</sup>

In 2020, youth sought to create brighter future for Native people through civic power rooted in their culture and tradition. By leading civic engagement initiatives and increasing visibility in democracy Native youth are creating better futures for generations to come. Throughout the year, Indigenous citizenship and sovereignty were upheld by building Native power and being a good relative through civic engagement. Although there remains much work to do, Native youth are making sure that their communities are counted, represented in data, on ballots, and in local and national public offices.

*Written by Kendra Becenti.*





Jaycie B. (Santa Clara Pueblo, Navajo) Description: My piece is called intergenerational power. This piece includes me, my mom, both of my grandmas, and my great-great-grandma. The corn represents life and the clouds are enabling the corn to grow and thrive. I was always taught that you carry all of the past generations with you. These past generations are what makes you resilient when faced with trouble. They are what make you so connected with your culture and the past. All of the intergenerational trauma that you carry turns into intergenerational power.



By bringing Indigenous knowledge into classrooms and institutions we bring empowerment and accessibility to our students.

02



# Education & Jobs

## We are committed to supporting Native youth on their journey of education and employment.

*To achieve educational success in Indian Country, we must support Native American youth in a holistic way to address these statistics.*

To discuss education, we must first acknowledge the historical trauma that is interconnected to Indian Boarding Schools and other institutions which forced assimilation and eroded or attempted to erase Native culture and tradition. These lived experiences of our grandparents have transitioned into intergenerational traumas that to this day are inseparable for many of our youth, students, and their families. Today, we see low grades, high drop-out rates, and lack of motivation to pursue higher education as a direct result of these traumas. To achieve educational success in Indian Country, we must support Native American youth in a holistic way to address these statistics.

### **COVID-19 & THE BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION**

We have a responsibility to address fundamental nuisances with the systems Native youth are learning, or, not learning in. Education is a pathway for change for historic and current barriers that have plagued Native youth and follow them into adulthood. To truly achieve academic success, we need to address inequities that exist in federal funding for education.

As we watch the nation grapple with back to school learning for students and youth across the nation amid a global pandemic, Native youth are facing new traumas that disproportionately will impact health and well-being, and access to education. On September 16th, The **Bureau of Indian Education** (BIE), which implements federal Indian education programs for 46,000 students at 183 schools across the U.S., mandated the return to classroom education in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>34</sup> The BIE Return to Learn Plan is a multi-step plan designed to help ensure safety during the pandemic. Across the nation, federally funded public schools are navigating online and hybrid in-person education models. For students who attend BIE schools, however, brings barriers and concerns.

In class education for Native youth has the potential to create a new generation of institutionalized trauma. Many Native youth live in homes together with relatives of with multiple generations. The reality is, youth who live in remote villages or reservations have limited access to healthcare and limited utilities, including running water. Should youth

get sick at school, there is a high chance to spread within an intergenerational home, including vulnerable and elders. Native youth should not have the burden of risking relative's health for the sake of education.

Additionally, remote communities and reservations often have limited broadband and internet access. Without adequate broadband, Native youth are at a learning disadvantage. The **Bureau of Indian Education** is working to provide the safest learning environment possible, but inadequate funding and lack of resources are amplifying the disparity Native youth face.<sup>35</sup> Public schools across the United States have online portals and are providing computers, and in some areas free and reduced lunch delivery to students to keep them safe and at home during this pandemic. BIE schools cannot provide this same level of support due to lack of funding.

Native youth are worthy of safe spaces and accessibility to ensure academic success.

### INDIGENIZING EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Native youth are strong advocates for the education they would like to see in these systems. The **Center for Native American Youth** is fortunate to work with some of these young leaders through our **Champions for Change** program.

**2020 Champion for Change. Owen Oliver** (Quinault and Pueblo of Isleta) is a junior at the University of Washington studying American Indian Studies. **Owen** works with his peers to increase visibility and normalize conversations of higher education to Native youth. **Owen** states, "by bringing Indigenous knowledge into classrooms and institutions we bring empowerment and accessibility to our students". **Owen** is also the Coastal Chair for intertribal student organization at the University called **First Nations**. With 8 of his fellow **First Nations** members, **Owen** visited Quileute Tribal school, a K-12 school on the **Quileute Indian reservation** on the west coast of Washington. For a week, the **First Nations** students visited classrooms to talk about the importance of higher education with Native youth in kindergarten through high school. Dedicated to increasing visibility of Natives in college, the **First Nations** group has also partnered with other tribal schools on reservations throughout Washington State. This type of community engagement is replicable and many Native youth leaders are creating and supporting space for promoting education and leading by example.

"Can you imagine a future where Native youth are learning and educating others on curriculum that was built and curated by Native elders, tribal and urban community members? I can. This is already happening

across states and school systems, but we need it to be universal and most importantly, streamlined to each region. I hold up my peers to create Indigenous future that educates through multi-disciplinary actions and love for their communities."

**Warren Davis** (Navajo Nation), also a **2020 Champion for Change**, works daily with the Native youth in his local school district to create intentional leadership roles for themselves. Through these youth leader roles, Warren promotes healthy living, mental wellness, and cultural revitalization for his community. He is creating a language curriculum that will be easily accessible for others wanting to learn the Navajo language and culture. "The most important thing is to teach that we are not only a part of history, we are all here today."

Incorporating cultural lessons, normalizing conversations of higher education, increasing visibility and representation of Indigenous scholars into education systems has the power to increase retention, graduation and increase enrollment at higher education institutions for Native youth.

Postsecondary education across the United States has changed drastically in response to COVID-19. Some colleges have staggered learning for students, others are completely online for the entire academic year. **Tribal Colleges and Universities** (TCUs) have been severely impacted. TCUs are place-based institutions of higher education, chartered by tribes and the federal government with the purpose to provide opportunities through education that are locally and culturally based, holistic and supportive.<sup>36</sup> The **American Indian Higher Education Consortium** (AIHEC) is a collective voice of the nation's 37 TCUs. "TCUs have the worst internet access, at the highest average cost, when compared to all other colleges and universities in the United States. TCUs educate more enrolled American Indians and Alaska Natives than any other postsecondary education institutions in the United States."<sup>37</sup> **AIHEC** also stresses the need for broadband and for training for faculty who most likely have never taught classes online. **AIHEC** recommends community-based internet access points on rural and remote Indian reservations where reliable internet access and equipment are nonexistent. Most, if not all, TCUs have moved to remote learning. An example is **Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Community College** in Wisconsin had transitioned to online learning and classes offered paper packets for students who do not have internet access at home. The college hopes to offer laptops to students who do have quality internet access in their homes. Personal protective gear is provided by the college and student support services are offered through email and phone. The **CAREs Act** provided minimal funding to the college, with at least 50% to go directly to eligible students.<sup>38</sup>



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The most important thing is to teach that we are not only a part of history, we are all here today.

2020 Champion for Change: Warren Davis (Navajo Nation).

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***“The impact of deculturization and eradication of Native values and heritage at these schools left a residual trauma in pursuing work that many of our grandparents and great grandparents mastered.”***

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### **MASCOTS IN EDUCATION**

This year, there has been a movement to address racial and cultural disparities which have undermined Native American identity in the school system, particularly in the form of race-based mascots. The persistent efforts of Native Youth like **CNAY’s Youth Advisory Board** member and **2018 Champion for Change Anthony Tamez**, (Wuskwiki Sipiik First Nations Cree and Sicangu Lakota) increase awareness of the detrimental impacts of race-based mascots in the education system as well as professional teams.

**Dr. Stephanie Fryberg** (Tulalip) has done an extensive study on impacts of mascots in partnership with the organization IllumiNative. **Dr. Fryberg** states, “the science clearly demonstrates that there are no benefits for Natives being used as mascots. Using Natives as mascots is related to lower self-esteem, less achievement-related aspirations, greater anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation. None of these things are what you would associate with something done in the name of honoring a group.”<sup>39</sup>

The movement to end all race-based mascots is on the rise in schools though there is still much more work to be done. Since 2015, **Adidas** has worked with high schools who use Native American mascots by providing free design resources and financial assistance to those schools. Anthony will continue to advocate that schools and other professional teams change their name. “Mascots were created as propaganda to legitimize the policy of kill the Indian save the man. Residential schools were also part of that policy. As we move into the next generation of standards, it’s clear we must eliminate race-based mascots and look forward to a more equitable future for all.”

### **JOBS**

The pipeline for education to career continues to be a multifaceted challenge. In fact, in 2009 just 1% of American Indians and Alaska Natives were enrolled in degree-granting institutions.<sup>40</sup> The percent that have a bachelor’s degree or higher pales in comparison to

all other identified populations, with percentages at or lower than 13 %.<sup>41</sup> Similar to education barriers that exist in rural Native communities and villages, employment opportunities are also challenging. Unlike education, there are no treaty rights to ensure employment for Native youth.

Keeping Native youth on a path towards success and self-reliance is critical for the future health of our communities. In the inaugural **State of Native Youth Report**, there was a large focus on the correlation of education to career. Historically, Indian Boarding Schools focused on “civilizing” our peoples and preparing us for jobs in labor and industry with trade skills. Today, we see workforce development at tribal colleges and universities and other community readiness programs.

The impact of deculturization and eradication of Native values and heritage at these schools left a residual trauma in pursuing work that many of our grandparents and great grandparents mastered. The result of this has been felt as a strong push towards the necessity of post-secondary education. The reality is not all our Native youth have the same opportunities in education and not all of them want to pursue this path as a direction towards financial independence and self-reliance. It is time we support all our Native youth by promoting every possible opportunity for success.

We have seen numerous job fairs focused on employing Natives emerge. It is not enough to recruit Native peoples for positions, the workforce must also create systems of support for success. This means understanding and respecting Native cultures, treating employees in a holistic manner and commitment to growing the mind, body, and spirit of a Native employee.

The **Center for Native American Youth** supports professional development for youth through providing opportunities of project management, community engagement, and financial literacy. This is done through community action projects that are deeply rooted in Native culture and provide support throughout the projects. These are all tools and experiences that young people can carry with them when they enter the workforce.

Though COVID-19 has impacted education and employment, Native youth continue to persevere. Native youth have access to through virtual learning, remote working, and inclusivity in the workplace. We are committed to supporting Native youth on their journey of education and employment.

*Written by Sam Schimmel.*

Native Girls  
ARE STRONG



AND SMART!

Gracie N. Age 8. (Arapaho Absentee Shawnee)  
Description: "I am Indian strong."

# 03



*2019 Champion for Change, Shandiin Herrera (Diné).*



# Health & Wellness

## Native youth across the country are changing the narrative around Native health outcomes.

Native youth continue to drive initiatives in their communities that promote holistic ways of living and honor their traditional values.

Wellness has been a highly cherished part of life for generations of Native people. This is reflected in Native peoples' participation in ceremony and community, reverence for the foods born by the lands, and efforts to create pathways of wellbeing for future generations. In addition to promoting their own wellbeing, Native youth take great pride in supporting the health of others. Native youth are also drawing upon ancestral knowledge and tapping into their own creativity to help build and foster resilience among their people.

### UPLIFTING COMMUNITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

According to the **Indigenous Futures Survey**, a partnership between **CNAY**, **IllumiNative**, the **Native Organizers**

**Alliance** and the **University of Michigan**, mental health was noted as the highest priority for Native American youth. This year is marked by several health priorities whose urgency has been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. These priorities include destigmatizing mental health, promoting physical activity, and addressing health disparities among Native people that has only been exacerbated in 2020.

Mainstream media and research publications portray Native people as the demographic group with some of the worst health outcomes, including diabetes suicide ideation and more. However, these publications fail to provide the complete story. To better portray the realistic narrative of health disparities is to expose the link between settler colonial violence and poor health outcomes for Native people combined with the lack of economic access and inadequate



resources to fully realize tribal sovereignty, many Native communities continue to suffer from high rates of preventable diseases. To address this, Native youth are leading the movement to uplift restore ownership over health and wellness, tribal sovereignty and, ultimately, work towards solutions for these health challenges to better their communities. Native youth across the country are changing the narrative around Native health outcomes from reports of hopelessness and despair to those of resilience, growth, and love for self and community.

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***“Native youth are medicine, they are important, and they are sacred.”***

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#### CULTURE AS MEDICINE

Native youth are turning towards ancestral teachings to promote wellness in their communities. “Culture is a great resource for Native students,” says **CNAY** Associate Director of Research and Evaluation, **Dr. Billie Jo Kipp** (Blackfeet). “Our ancestors embodied resiliency. American Indian values and behaviors have always helped us deal with difficulty and continue to grow.” By drawing strength from their culture, Native youth are reimagining traditional approaches to wellness.

**Shavaughna Underwood** (Quinault Indian Nation), **2020 CNAY Champion for Change**, has lived in her peoples’ village all of her life. Shavaughna is a full-time student at Evergreen State College, studying healing from intergenerational trauma. In addition to her studies, she has many roles in her community, including serving as the Administrative Assistant to her tribe’s **Behavioral Health Program for Mental Health and Chemical Dependency**. “This role combines knowledge of culture and human services to help the **Quinault** community create coping mechanisms using traditional medicines and practices. We created prayer bundles with rocks from our beaches, cedar, or lavender oils with cedar boughs, sweetgrass, and sage. Written on these vials are words like ‘strong’ or ‘love’ in **Quinault** Language.” As Vice President of the **Quinault Culture Committee** and Secretary of the **Quinault Canoe Society**, **Shavaughna** works to ensure all feel welcome in the Quinault cultural circle. **Shavaughna’s** message to youth is, “You belong too. You can speak your language. You can paddle in a canoe. You belong in there; that’s where your ancestors were.”

#### NATIVE YOUTH ARE MEDICINE

During September of 2020, **CNAY**, the **Native Wellness Institute**, **We R Native**, and the **Tribal Health Reaching Out Involves Everyone** (THRIVE) project launched

the **Native Youth Are Medicine Campaign** in honor of Self-Care Awareness Month. The campaign aimed to spark conversations and inspire healing and self-love. A keystone of this campaign, the Celebrating Self Love Call for Submissions aimed to encourage healing among Native people of all ages. Participants were asked to submit entries that respond to the following prompt: “Celebrating Self-love: What does Self-Love and Self-Care mean to you? What does it look like for you, your family, or your community? How do you care for your mind, body, and spirit to be holistically well?”<sup>42</sup> One respondent, **Alyssa Falck** (Bishop Paiute), said,



*Alyssa's artwork.*

“My name is **Alyssa**. I am 13 years old. I’m a jingle dancer. I dance to heal our community. I wear a red dress in memory of all the beautiful Native missing women. Self-care to me means taking time to myself.

I draw things that are important to me. Protecting our culture & bringing attention to all the missing & murdered Indigenous women is most important.”

Alongside community-based advocacy, we have recently witnessed legislative victories promoting the health of Native people in 2019 and 2020. In February 2019, the **Native American Suicide Prevention Act** was introduced in the House of Representatives by **Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva** (AZ-03). The bill requires states that receive funding from the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** (SAMHSA) for statewide youth suicide prevention strategies to consult with the state's federally recognized tribes and other tribal organizations.<sup>43</sup>

### RESILIENCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Surviving and thriving in times of great struggle is what Native people have done since time immemorial. From the day European colonizers first arrived, they stole mass amounts of lands and committed genocide against Native people. Native people were introduced to biological warfare and diseases, such as smallpox and measles. Despite continued efforts to erase and silence these truths, Native youth are drawing on Indigenous values of collective wellbeing to survive the current viral threat to their communities.

Central to the discussion on community and mental health in 2020 is the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). In December 2019, COVID-19 was first detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. The highly contagious respiratory illness spread rapidly across the globe and began appearing in the western hemisphere in January 2020. Those at most significant risk of contracting and having severe disease complications are people 65 years and older, those living in long-term care facilities, and people with underlying medical conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, and asthma.<sup>44</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the everyday lives of Native people – impacting their livelihood and communities. Also, with high rates of poverty, diabetes, obesity, and asthma, Native people are among the most vulnerable to contracting and developing severe complications from COVID-19. To ensure resilient communities, Native youth are building support mechanisms that respond to their community's needs.

During the early stages of the pandemic, **Shandiin Herrera** (Diné) experienced first hand the Navajo community's urgent need for support. Shandiin, a **CNAV Youth Advisory Board** member, was a **2019 Champion for Change**, recognized for her advocacy work promoting Native youth engagement in the policy-making process. She is a graduate of Duke

University where she became the first Native American student from the university to be selected as a **Udall Foundation Scholar** and Intern.

Like many other communities throughout Indian Country, **Shandiin's** community was hit incredibly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the **Navajo Water Project**, 1 in 3 homes on the **Navajo Reservation** lack access to clean running water. In the Navajo reservation housing, like many other tribal communities, have multiple generations under the same roof. Additionally, substandard community infrastructures create food insecurity and supply shortages. These disparities were further exacerbated in May 2020, when the United States watched as the **Navajo Nation** became an epicenter for the COVID-19 virus. During that time, the **Navajo Nation** recorded the highest per-capita coronavirus infection rates in the country before New York and New Jersey. In response, the **Navajo Nation** government issued 57-hour lockdowns and curfews to limit the virus's spread.<sup>45</sup>

Seeing severe unmet needs across the **Navajo Nation**, **Shandiin** and fellow community members decided they needed a more hands-on approach to help their people. **Shandiin** helped kickstart the **Yee Ha'ólnii Doo** or the **Navajo & Hopi Families COVID Relief Effort**. Through their community organizing and grassroots efforts, the relief effort helped reach Native communities across the Southwest by providing households with two weeks' worth of food, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and isolation kits. As of September 2020, the organization spent over three-million dollars on direct relief, food, and supplies for Navajo and Hopi communities.

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***“[Our] biggest goal is to bring some hope, some light and encouragement to our people. It is completely possible to do this in your community. You don't have to be a billionaire or a politician, you just have to be a good community member.”***

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As the COVID-19 virus reached Native communities, tribes need funding to aid and protect their citizens. Congress passed three relief packages in late March 2020 that was supposed to provide support to tribes. The **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act** (CARES Act) allocated \$2.2 trillion to provide economic relief to state and tribal governments, service

providers, small businesses, and individuals.<sup>46</sup> The **CARES Act** allocated \$8 billion specifically for tribal governments. However, it wasn't until early May 2020 that tribes received 60% of the \$8 billion granted. The other 40%, to be dispersed based on the total number of tribal employees, was withheld by the U.S. Treasury Department.<sup>47</sup>

## Hybrid Pivot

*Due to the pandemic, students are having to navigate a virtual or "hybrid" (virtual and in-person) educational world.*

**The top three issues affecting Indigenous college students reported were:**

1. **They need to financially support family members (61%)**
2. **Their college has reduced financial aid (29%)**
3. **Their tribe has reduced tuition assistance (18%)**

*Indigenous Futures Survey*

Congress delayed tribes' access to the **CARES Act** aid, which prevented tribal governments from fully responding to their community's needs. The **2020 Indigenous Futures Survey** revealed that, prior to receiving CARES Act funding, 30% of people living on reservations did not have adequate access to PPE.<sup>48</sup> The federal government's failure to act demonstrates their indifference towards protecting Indian country—specifically rural and isolated Native communities. According to the **2020 Indigenous Futures Survey** results, 51% of participants with COVID-19 symptoms and/or diagnosis did not have access to testing. Moreover, 82% of participants who identify as Trans, Non-binary, Genderqueer, or Gender non-conforming with COVID-19 symptoms and/or diagnosis were unable to access testing.<sup>49</sup>

### BUILDING VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

Quarantine and isolation measures were put in place by tribal and state governments to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The inability to gather in community, or in-person, combined with the caution and risk associated with the virus, have increased feelings of depression, frustration, and stress among Native people. The pandemic has directly impacted the well-being of Native youth. According to the Indigenous

Futures Study, the pandemic has deteriorated emotional health among college students, with 74% reporting feeling stressed in the past month.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout the pandemic, Native people have found ways to maintain community. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, powwow gatherings, such as the **Annual Gathering of Nations Powwow**, were canceled. However, the popular **Social Distance Powwow Facebook** group offered a space to take powwows virtual. By June 2020, roughly four months into the pandemic quarantine, the group amassed over 190,000 members.<sup>51</sup> Native organizations also responded to this need to create virtual gatherings and social spaces and strengthen well-being through their programming, organizing, and social media content.

### NATIVE WELLNESS POWER HOURS

During the first weeks of the pandemic, the **Native Wellness Institute** (NWI) recognized the need to build virtual communities for Native peoples. To address this need, **NWI** began using Facebook Live to produce daily content which features stories, dialogues, and conversations on Indigenous wellness. "The **[NWI]** Power Hours were our contribution to the community when this Pandemic first started," says NWI Project Coordinator, **Shalene Joseph** (A'aniih and Athabascan). "It was our way to help alleviate some stress and share what we knew we had, and that was abundance." The Power Hour webinars feature discussions on ways of being, maintaining holistic wellness during pandemic times, and spreading awareness on issues impacting Native people, such as **MMIWGT2S+** (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Trans, and Two-spirits+). You can review all videos on NWI's Facebook page.<sup>52</sup>

### TELE-NATIVE YOUTH

In May 2020, **CNAY** launched the **Tele-Native Youth** webinar series (TNY) to create virtual spaces and build virtual community for Native youth to engage in conversation with each other and professionals on topics generated by youth. Since then, **CNAY** has hosted weekly TNY webinars on topics including: **Decolonizing Democracy, Dancing Is Medicine, Our Land Our Places, Laughter is Medicine, Music is Medicine**, and more. TNY has given young Native leaders, influencers, and organizers spaces to communicate with one another. Schools have reached out to **CNAY** to incorporate these webinars as part of their curriculum. **CNAY** will continue to host TNY for as long as Native youth request this virtual space. **Tele Native Youth** has featured guests, such as **Taboo** (Shoshone and Hopi) of the **Black Eyed Peas** and U.S. Senate Candidate for



ELDER  
PARKING

Waxmexw  
Warriors  
gwxolmexw  
cit'ox

Shavaughna is helping her relative fill out the Indigenous Futures Survey at a Canoe Society event hosted during COVID where they practiced social distancing and traditional ways.

“

We created prayer bundles with rocks from our beaches, cedar, or lavender oils with cedar boughs, sweetgrass, and sage. Written on these vials are words like 'strong' or 'love' in Quinault Language.

Idaho, **Paulette Jordan** (Coeur d'Alene), members of the 1491's to name a few. Visit CNAY's website to watch all webinars.

### FOOD SYSTEMS SOVEREIGNTY

From coast to coast, the countless array of rivers, watersheds, landforms, vegetation, and climatic zones have worked together for thousands of years to shape and form traditional indigenous lands and food systems. The traditional diets of Native peoples varied greatly, yet the traditional foodways of most indigenous communities were built around subsistence principles and a close connection to land. Culture, spatiality, storytelling, and even traditional healing practices, were all weaved into hunting, gathering, and other substances practices. As such, traditional foodways and practices were interconnected to all other areas of indigenous lifeways. However, many parts of Indigenous food systems were disrupted following colonization. Genocide, forced removal and relocation, and assimilation practices separated Native people from their traditional foodways.

The loss of Native food sovereignty significantly changed the food landscape in tribal communities—rural and urban—and brought about a nutrition transition from traditional foods to more accessible nutrient-poor foods. This shift in diet, along with elements of food insecurity has contributed to large health disparities for many Native peoples. For example, Native people suffer from obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes at rates higher than other non-Hispanic white Americans.<sup>53</sup> These poor outcomes are leading to other chronic diseases, shortened life spans, and severely impacting the overall quality of life.

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***“The inability to gather in community, or in-person, combined with the caution and risk associated with the virus, have increased feelings of depression, frustration, and stress among Native people.”***

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The theft of lands severed the kinship tie to traditional foods. Industrial farming replaced traditional subsistence practices with hyper-production and the genetic modification of traditional crops and livestock. Seeds were often taken out of communities, only to be stored in universities and museums, which led to a loss of thousands of traditional seeds. Only recently have communities been reunited with some of their

traditional seeds. In 2018, the **Indigenous Seed Keepers Networks** (ISKN) reunited the **Taos Pueblo** people with a seed bundle and squash after more than a decade.<sup>54</sup> The **ISKN** is a group of more than 100 tribal seed-sovereignty projects whose mission is to “nourish and assist the growing **Seed Sovereignty Movement** across Turtle Island (North America)” and help rematriate traditional seeds to their communities.<sup>55</sup> The ISKN is just one example of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement seeking to restore traditional food systems that support tribal sovereignty and wellness.

Native communities continue to demonstrate sustainable ways of living despite structural inequities caused by colonization.<sup>56</sup> As demonstrated by the **Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska** in their 2018 report, **Inuit Past and Current Managers of Marine Resources Focus Group: Food Sovereignty and Self Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources**, food sovereignty must be achieved in order to achieve food security.<sup>57</sup> To aid in this pursuit, Native youth are beginning initiatives that redirect ownership, funds and ecological knowledge back to their communities.

Native youth often turn to traditional foods ways to connect with their culture and promote health. The narratives of Native health depict unhealthy cycles with adverse outcomes. Yet, Native people have reclaimed and transformed their relationships to food, culture, and well-being. The **Indigenous Futures Survey** reported that of their 6,460 Native participants, 95% said they eat or cook Native American food. Native people choose diets like those of their ancestors and are working to strengthen that relationship to traditional foods.

In 2019, The **National Congress of American Indians' Tribal Sovereignty Advancement Initiative** spotlighted the **Yurok** nation's efforts to protect the **Klamath River's** salmon.<sup>58</sup> The report explains that “overfishing, excessive timber harvesting, widespread habitat destruction, and declining water levels caused by prolonged droughts and area agricultural operations have placed in great jeopardy the salmon that rely on the **Klamath River** for their survival.” Because of their cultural and ancestral reliance on the **Klamath River** and the Salmon it cares for, the **Yurok** tribe worked with land stewards in the area to enact a landmark agreement with California and Oregon to undam the river by 2020. The tribe also ratified the **Yurok Pesticide Ordinance** that would declare their nation a pesticide-free zone.<sup>59</sup> This is one of many examples of Native people working to heal their communities and the surrounding landscape and regaining food sovereignty.

Native youth are helming the **Indigenous Foods Movement** equipped with cultural knowledge ready

to guide their communities to holistic wellness. *Gather* (2020) documents the vital role that reconnecting to traditional foods plays in many Native communities. It follows the stories of **Chef Nephi Craig** (White Mountain Apache), **Sam Gensaw** (Yurok), **Twila Cassadore** (San Carlos Apache), and **Elsie DuBray** (Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe or Oohenunpa Lakota, Nueta and Hidatsa). They are working to reclaim traditional relationships to food and create innovations in practicing food sovereignty.<sup>60</sup> The documentary film spotlights their stories of Indigenous passion, resilience, and excellence.



*Elsie DuBray.*

*Gather* follows **Elsie DuBray**, a scientist, knowledge keeper, and member of the **Buffalo Nation**. The documentary features her high school science project, a groundbreaking comparison of buffalo meat's nutritional content to beef. **Elsie's** multi-year research into the health benefits of grass-fed buffalo meat research has

been shared with Native communities through the **American Indian Science and Engineering Society Conference** and the **Missouri River Breaks Research Symposium** at the **Intertribal Agriculture Council Conference**. She shares her father's love, care, and respect for the buffalo, which, much like Indigenous people, had survived almost complete extermination when, by the end of the 19th century, there were only a few hundred in the wild.<sup>61</sup>

For the future, **Elsie** hopes to see little kids surrounded by buffalo from the time they are very little. She adds, "they have taken care of us forever, and now we need to take care of them. We have to uphold the integrity of the buffalo." Witnessing her father's work in buffalo restoration, **Elsie** combines her love for her community and passion for science to investigate buffalo's health benefits, something that her people have known forever. Having grown up with her family's herd of about 400 buffalo who roam freely throughout their ancestral lands, **Elsie** uses western science as a tool to reinforce traditional knowledge and restore health to her people. She is majoring in Human Biology with a concentration in the biochemical applications in the holistic health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities. She is also pursuing a minor in Native American Studies.

**Brandon Lujan** (Taos Pueblo) is also working to promote food sovereignty and sustainability in his community. He teaches leadership to youth through agriculture and incorporates traditional knowledge into his lessons. As a youth leader himself, he uses ancestral food to encourage others to engage in and carry on their cultures. **Brandon** takes groups of youth from his community on hikes into the surrounding area to teach Native youth about healthy foods and traditional wild plants. He also brings elders and language instructors to pass on information and stories about the land.

He hopes his work will make sure that "youth have the confidence to ask questions and learn as much as they can about their cultures." For **Brandon**, "it is amazing how old our ways are and it is really important that our traditional ways are respected and preserved." He believes that building a strong community means caring for one another, preserving traditional ways of connecting to the earth, and eating healthy foods.

In 2019, the **Tribal Nutrition Improvement Act** was introduced in the House by **Deb Haaland** (NM-01), **Assistant Speaker Ben Ray Luján** (NM-03), and **Representative Raúl M. Grijalva** (AZ-03) that grants tribes the responsibility to provide **Child Nutrition Programs**.<sup>62</sup> The introduction of bills, such as the **Tribal Nutrition Act of 2019**, along with the advocacy of Native youth, are instrumental in promoting food sovereignty in Indian Country.



## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Sexual and Reproductive Health has always been a priority for Indigenous communities. Traditionally, many communities used traditional medicine for contraception and control pain before and during childbirth.<sup>63</sup> Today, high rates of sexually transmitted diseases, teen birth rates, and infant mortality are prevalent in many tribal communities.<sup>64</sup> One explanation for these disparities fall on the chronic mistrust and underfunding of **Indian Health Services (IHS)**.

Mistrust of federal services exists due to a lengthy history of forced sterilization of Native American women in IHS facilities, human rights violations, and inadequate care from a system created as reparations for the United States' crimes against Indigenous people. Compared to whites, Native people are significantly more mistrusting of the healthcare systems and less satisfied.<sup>65</sup> These health care systems remain broken despite many improvements. In February of 2020, a grand jury indicted two IHS doctors for sexually assaulting their patients.<sup>66</sup> For Native people, these injustices have led to a severe distrust of government entities, especially in the health care and medical fields.



Brandon Lujan.

Underfunding of IHS facilities has also made it nearly impossible for many tribes to provide adequate health care to their communities. In an article published by the **American Journal of Public Health**, researchers investigate to what extent the **Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)** has failed to properly allocate funding "for the benefit, care, and assistance of the Indians throughout the United States," as described in the **Snyder Act of**

**1921**. They reveal that bringing the IHS to an equitable benchmark, such as the **Federal Employee Health Benefits Plan**, would require an additional \$3 billion per year.<sup>67</sup>

Access to proper family planning resources has also been virtually unavailable until recently. In a 2010 lawsuit, the **Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center** advocated for the Plan B One-Step pill to become available in all IHS clinics. However, it was not until five years later that the IHS updated its policy to finally require the emergency contraceptive in its pharmacies.<sup>68</sup> The policy improvement points to a right that all Native women should have - to rely on the IHS for reproductive care and services to support her agency and control over her own body.

## STD, HIV, AND AIDS AWARENESS

The Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) epidemic disproportionately affects Indigenous people.<sup>69</sup> In 2018, Native Americans were about 1.3% of the United States population and 0.5% of HIV diagnoses. However, between 2010 and 2017, HIV diagnoses increased by 39% among Native people.<sup>70</sup> This points to an increasing need to promote STD, HIV, and AIDS awareness in a way that speaks to Native people and their needs. More direct funds for prevention and testing in tribal communities are also needed.

March 20th marked **National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day**. The goal of this day was to encourage Native people to seek education and know their HIV status.<sup>71</sup> Organizations around the U.S. are working to promote HIV/AIDS prevention among rural and urban Native people. The **Albuquerque Indian Health Board** provides testing services to "increase access to HIV-related services, reduce stigma, make HIV testing a routine, and improve engagement in care."<sup>72</sup> Similarly, **Native VOICES** (Video Opportunities for Innovative Condom Education and Safer Sex), an initiative through **Healthy Native Youth**, produced a 23-minute video that aims to encourage condom use and HIV/STI testing among heterosexual, and LGBTQ2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Two Spirit) Indigenous youth ages 15-24 years old. These videos can be accessed through the **Healthy Native Youth** website.<sup>73</sup>

## MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Women and mothers play essential roles within many Native family structures and communities. Native kinship systems are often matrilineal; therefore, women are the life-givers and carriers of culture. Supporting Native women and mothers has a significant impact on the overall health of Native families and communities.

Indigenous women are four-to-five times more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts.<sup>74</sup> Institutionalized racism, implicit bias, and a health care system that disproportionately impacts Indigenous

bodies are all factors that contribute to this staggering statistic. Accessing care in rural areas also contributes heavily to this grave disparity. For instance, many **Alaska Native Women** from **Iñupiat, Yupik, Aleut, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian** communities must travel long distances by plane or snowmobile to access healthcare services and hospitals.

For Alaska Native children, this makes them extremely vulnerable to experiencing complications when systemic racism, forced migration, and climate change are worsening this maternal and child health disparity. Moreover, research and data often exclude Native Women and children, which causes further marginalization and misrepresentation of specific challenges. The most urgent being climate change effects, such as thawing permafrost and rising sea levels, could force many Alaska Native communities and families to relocate.<sup>75</sup> Climate change effects contribute to the high rates of Infant deaths. Compared to white infants in Alaska, Alaska Native infants are four times more likely to die in the first year of their lives.

#### MIDWIVES AND DOULAS

Today, Indigenous midwives make up only 1% of all practicing midwives in the United States.<sup>76</sup> However, midwifery has always been an Indigenous practice. Published in 2019, **Reproduction on the Reservation: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Colonialism in the Long Twentieth Century** describes the pregnancy, child birthing, and care practices that traditionally occurred in Indigenous communities, specifically the **Crow Nation**. This included encouraging expecting mothers to “rise early, stay active, and drink plenty of water.” The book also describes that women had a “generally positive attitude to childbirth,” in contrast to the fear many European mothers felt toward birth-giving.<sup>77</sup>



Madison White

**Madison Ikenonoronhawi White, 2019 Champion for Change**, knows the benefit of providing **Indigenous child-birthing alterNatives** to Native women of her community. Madison is from the **Mohawk Nation of Iroquoian Confederacy**, where she is an **Onkwehonwe Full-Spectrum Doula**. As the oldest sister of thirteen younger siblings, Madison learned early about the special care that Native babies and mothers need. As a mother herself, becoming a full-spectrum doula meant supporting women and future generations through the sacred birthing process.

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***“Indigenous women are four-to-five times more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts.”***

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In a study done by the U.S. General Accounting Office, they found that, between 1973 and 1976, the IHS sterilized 3,406 American Indian women without their permission.<sup>78</sup> **Madison** describes that these extreme violations against “Indigenous women’s bodies, their sacred portals, and the tender moments of new life” perpetuate systems of trauma in women, children, and communities. For **Madison**, when mothers experience trauma in pregnancy and birth, then her “children will go through trauma because that’s the way they are being brought into the world.” Thus, access to Indigenous birthing practices works to undo this systematic trauma incited by colonial health systems.

Like **Madison**, **The Changing Woman Initiative** works to ensure that Native women have access to Indigenous-centered, decolonized, and safe childbirth options. The organization is a non-profit located in Santa Fe, New Mexico offering homebirth services and women’s health resources for Indigenous women in the surrounding area. They aim to “renew cultural birth knowledge to empower and reclaim indigenous sovereignty of women’s medicine and life way teachings to promote reproductive wellness, healing through holistic approaches and to strengthen women’s bonds to family and community.”<sup>79</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, expecting mothers have had restricted access to health care providers. Thus, some women must choose between birth at home or in a medical facility with quarantine restrictions. Although some mothers may feel unease about birthing outside of hospitals, **Madison** thinks of it as a powerful and necessary step towards rebirthing nations, raising sovereign people, and reclaiming agency over Indigenous bodies. “As a matrilineal society, there is no higher power on this mortal Earth than the womb.”



"Having a homebirth during the pandemic was one of the most beautiful things I had the honor of being a part of. With the social-distancing and sanitization regulations that were put in place due to COVID-19, she was given little to no choice but to have a home birth. The whole experience felt exactly like the stories I was told of our previous generations when they would have births in our home villages—taking turns checking on Mom, taking care of all the children, cooking, cleaning, sharing stories, the shared excitement, the shared tears – all in her home, and not a secluded hospital.

Traditionally, the moment labor had started, we lit a fire and put tobacco prayers in to help guide the baby's spirit to his family. I think the most memorable aspect of this birth was that we experienced everything as one huge family. Whereas usually, the mother experiences the pain, discomfort, and exhaustion all alone – we were all there every step of the way, which made it equally gratifying when the baby finally made it."

Addressing the maternal and child health crisis among Native populations is a priority for youth, organizations, and Native lawmakers. In November

2019, **Representative Deb Haaland** (NM-01) introduced the **Native Women's Maternal Health Resolution**, which, if passed, would create and improve access for Indigenous women to "comprehensive and culturally competent maternal health care and family planning services." It would also call for urgent funding to support current and future programs that support Native women's reproductive health because when we have healthy, supported mothers--we have healthy and supported communities.<sup>80</sup>

In conclusion, despite the significant barriers and challenges Native people have faced in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous people have remained strong and resilient. They are caring for their people's overall wellbeing using traditional and cultural approaches that continue to be practiced across generations. By strengthening community and mental health, relationships to traditional foods, and access to trauma-informed, culturally relevant health care, Native youth, organizations, and leaders are increasing the overall health of Native communities.

*Written by Kendra Becenti.*



Isadora O. (Chinook, Isleta Pueblo)  
Description: When I think of my what gives me strength I immediately think of my ancestors. I live my life with my ancestors in mind. My people think our ancestors live in the trees. So for my drawing I put them in a cedar tree doing traditional activities. For the dancer I put Marvin Oliver's (my father) salmon egg. He's helped me get to where I am art wise. Unfortunately, he passed away last year so I wanted to honor him in this piece. At the bottom I'm looking up to my ancestors wearing traditional Chinook regalia and holding paddle.



# Sacred Sites, Lands & Waterways

**Realizing a complete vision of sovereignty, racial and environmental justice, and the ideals of the Indigenous movement.**

Native youth resilience is acknowledging and understanding the responsibility to protect and care for **Mother Earth**, and our traditional sacred sites, lands and waterways for future generations to come.

## **PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES FROM EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES**

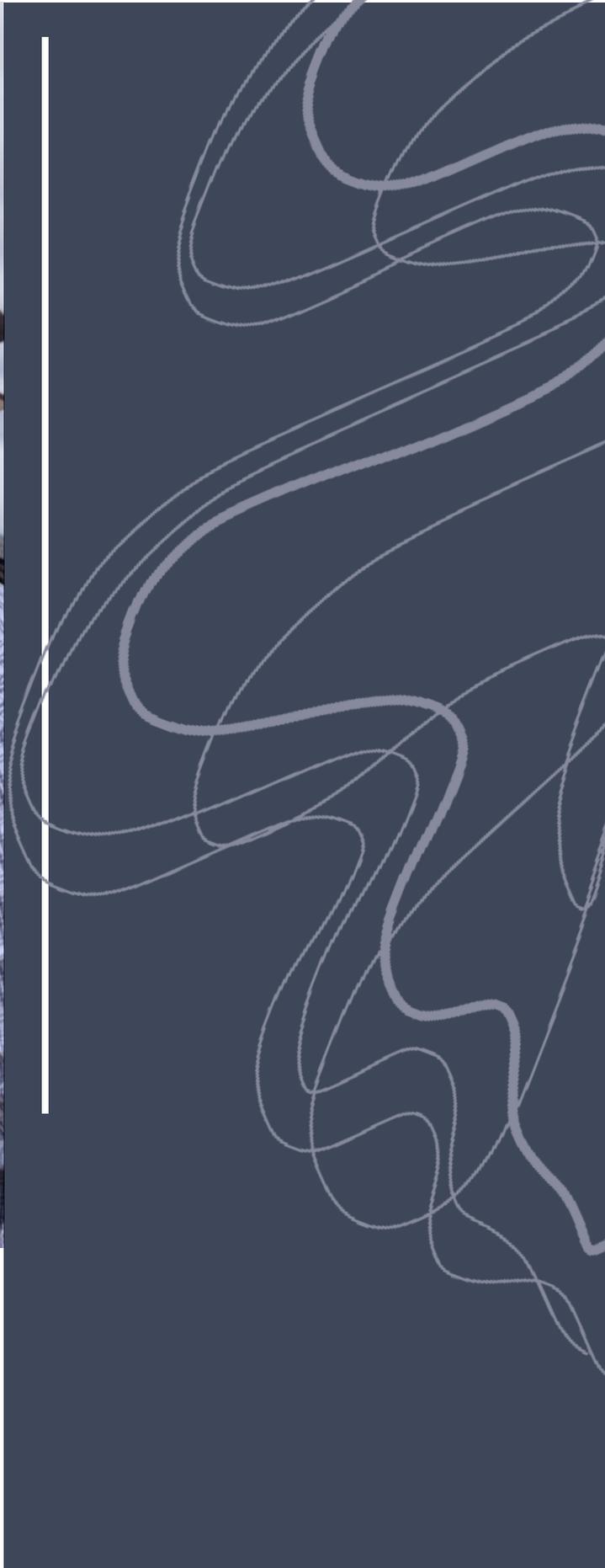
This resilience of Native youth can be seen through the escalating conflicts between Native people and extractive industries over threats to sacred sites, lands, and waterways. Native people have the sovereign right to maintain and strengthen their cultural and spiritual connection with their traditional lands. Any obstruction to sacred sites, lands and waterways needs to be in consultation with Native communities. Yet, extractive industries continue to disregard the sovereignty of Tribal communities by seeking to invade traditional lands to extract hazardous materials, and by doing so, contaminating and destroying sacred sites, lands and waterways. Native youth have been leading the efforts to mitigate some of the destructive effects of extractive industries, but each battle is long, and new threats continue to emerge. However, Native youth are



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*In March 2020, CNAY's Executive Director, Nikki Pitre, traveled to the Tohono O'odham Nation to learn about the impacts of the border.*



resilient, and they continue to work on the ground and in government spaces to ensure their voices are heard and that they are part of the larger movement to protect Native lands from hazardous extractive industries.

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***“For generations, my ancestors have fought for the protection of the Grand Canyon and sacred sites like Sipaapuni. It is now time for my generation to step up and join the fight.”***

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Tribes are the third largest owners of mineral resources in the nation; however, they have borne a long history of exploitation of their resources without their consent and to their detriment. The federal trust doctrine calls for the protection of Indian trust lands and Indian rights to use those lands and the protection of tribal sovereignty and rights of self-governance. However, the history of removal, relocation, and land dispossession opened portions of reservations and tribal lands to non-Indian ownership. The resulting checkerboard land ownership causes a great deal of dispute over which government – tribal or state – has jurisdiction over the non-Indians’ land as well as conduct and activities of Indians and non-members on the lands. The result is that sacred sites, lands, and waterways are often leased out, by the state or federal government, to corporations for mining, logging, or drilling without consultation, violating the sovereignty of Tribal nations.

In Alaska, the **Gwich’in Steering Committee**, an intergenerational group representing the **Native Gwich’in tribe of Alaska and Canada**, along with several environmental groups, filed a lawsuit against Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt and the Trump Administration to protect the **Coastal Plain** of the **Arctic National Wildlife Refuge** (ANWR), known to the Tribes as **Izhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit**, the **Sacred Place Where Life Begins**, from oil and gas development.<sup>81</sup> It comes after the Interior Secretary announced plans for an oil and gas leasing program in the **ANWR**, that would open up drilling on 1.56 million acres of sacred **Gwich’in** land.<sup>82</sup> “The coastal plain is one of the most important natural, cultural and subsistence resources to the **Neets’aiti Gwich’in of Arctic Village** and **Venetie** and to the **Gwich’in** people as a whole,” said **Margorie Gemmill**, First Chief of the **Native Village of Venetie**. “The cultural identity of the **Gwich’in** people as caribou people is intertwined with the **Porcupine Caribou Herd**’s calving area in the **Coastal Plain**,” she said. “Any

impacts to the **Porcupine Caribou Herd** from changes in migration patterns, lower fertility rates and loss of habitat will have significant adverse social, cultural, spiritual and subsistence impacts on our people.”

The **Gwich’in Steering Committee’s Youth Council** have been traveling from coast to coast advocating for the protection of their homelands from the desecration that would be caused by oil drilling and advocating for climate change policy. “Our ancestors made a promise to protect this land, so we have to keep that promise and our way of life,” says **Kaila Druck**, a 16-year-old member of the **Youth Council**. Native youth are finding healing and resilience through the fight. “We need more Indigenous youth to believe in themselves and have people believe in them,” says **Youth Council** member, **Quannah Chasing Horse Potts**. “The more I fought, the more I healed. Know you have power. It is connected to the land and ancestors. We’re all fighting the same fight.”

The oil and gas industries are not the only extractive industries impacting sacred sites, lands, and waterways. There’s a long legacy of contamination from uranium mining across the **Colorado Plateau** that continues to pollute the sacred sites, lands, and waterways of at least 11 tribes, including the **Havasupai Tribe**, **Hualapai Tribe**, **Hopi Tribe**, **Navajo Nation**, and others. **Red Butte** is the birthplace of the **Havasupai** people, their place of emergence. Today, a uranium mine sits less than five miles from their sacred site, and about 10 miles from the south rim of **Grand Canyon National Park**.<sup>83</sup> The mine also sits on top of multiple aquifers, which feed the springs that the **Havasupai** rely on to drink, cook, and irrigate their fields of corn and alfalfa, and other ceremonial and cultural uses.<sup>84</sup>

The contamination from uranium mining will impact the lives of tribal communities for generations. Uranium has a half-life that spans millions of years, and health consequences that include lung, stomach, and other cancers and other serious health conditions, such as lung and kidney disease.<sup>85</sup> Some epidemiologist also believe that contamination can be linked to a rare syndrome known as “**Navajo neuropathy**,” which manifests in deformities of extremities and damaged eyes and liver.<sup>86</sup> The political and social context in which these exposures developed highlights a history of environmental injustices based in clashes of cultural values, and political and ethical failures to support negotiated treaty rights. There are over 500 abandoned uranium mines on the **Navajo Nation**<sup>87</sup> where a recent study found that over a quarter of **Navajo** women tested had elevated levels of uranium in their bodies, as did newborn babies.<sup>88</sup> Traditional lifestyles, such as eating or harvesting local plants for sustenance, ceremonial or medicinal purposes, or drinking from historically used water sources may result in exposure to mine wastes

now contaminating these sources. Although tribal nations have exercised their sovereignty and banned uranium mining, they still lack the resources and capacity to begin clean-up of these sites.<sup>89</sup>

In 2012, the Secretary of the Interior put a temporary stop to uranium exploration by issuing a 20-year ban on new uranium mines on public lands surrounding the Grand Canyon in order to study the risks and potential impacts on groundwater and ecosystem. 800 active mining claims around the Grand Canyon remain, but through the advocacy of numerous tribal nations, the House of Representatives passed the **Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act**—legislation that would permanently protect the canyon from new threats of uranium mining.<sup>90</sup> A companion bill was introduced in the Senate.<sup>91</sup>

**Lexie James**, a member of the Hopi Tribe, is committed to advocating for protections for the Grand Canyon and educating the public, media and policy makers on the impacts of uranium mining. "The Grand Canyon is the place from which we emerged and the place to which we will ultimately return in the end," said Lexie. "As the first and true caretakers of the land, our responsibility is to protect the lands and waterways—our home-- for future generations."

### PROTECTING THE SACRED

Being in right relationship with land, water, culture and community defines Indigenous resilience. The resilience of Native youth is innate, spiritual, and is relational to sacred sites, lands, and waterways. For many tribal nations, religious, spiritual, medicinal and cultural practices are linked to very specific geographical locations. If that sacred site no longer existed or was inaccessible to Native people, those specific religious, spiritual, medicinal and cultural practices would no longer survive. Across the world, traditional sacred sites, lands, and waterways are under siege. Indigenous people continue to endure an ongoing battle for their right to access and utilize lands as they see fit. For Ingenious peoples, the development and interference with the ability to access and use sacred sites violate religious freedom and tribal sovereignty, and Native youth play a critical role in the protection of these sites.

In Arizona, President Trump's U.S. Mexico border wall threatens multiple sacred sites of the **Tohono O'odham Nation**. **Tohono O'odham** traditional land, in what is now southern Arizona, historically extended into Mexico, before being split in two—without the tribe's consent.<sup>92</sup> As many as 2,000 of the tribe's more than 30,000 members still live on the Mexico side.<sup>93</sup> **Tohono O'odham** people used to travel between the United States and Mexico fairly easily on roads without checkpoints for ceremony at sacred sites and to visit family and friends.<sup>94</sup>

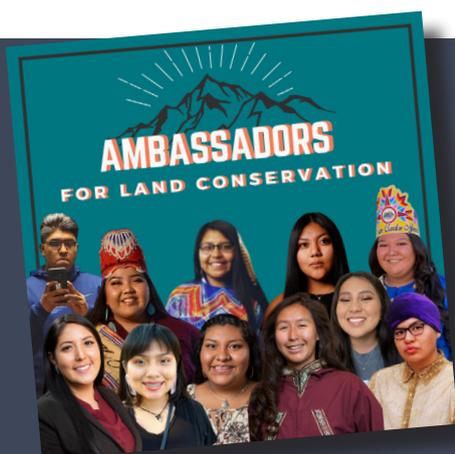
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***"In visiting with the Tohono O'odham people, it is clear that the border is an artificial line drawn by those who have a desire to divide people, culture and tradition."***

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In February, construction teams building the board wall began blasting through **Monument Hill** in the **Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument**, a site sacred to the **Tohono O'odham**.<sup>95</sup> The tribe was only notified of the destruction on the day of the blasting. Testifying before a congressional subcommittee, **Tohono O'odham Chairman Ned Norris** became emotional watching footage of the destruction. "It's hard to see the blasting that you showed on the video today," **Norris** said while choking back tears, "because I know in my heart, and from what our elders have told us, that that area is home to our ancestors. Blasting and doing what we saw today has totally disturbed, totally forever damaged our people."<sup>96</sup>

In March, **CNAY's Executive Director, Nikki Pitre**, traveled to the **Tohono O'odham Nation** to learn about the impacts of the border and discuss youth-led conservation efforts. **Nikki** traveled with **Nuetra Tierra Conservation Project (NTCP)** based out of Las Cruces, NM. During the visit, **CNAY** and **NTCP** learned of the



### AMBASSADORS FOR LAND CONSERVATION

**Ambassadors for Land Conservation (ALC)** is a place-based program created to empower Native American youth, ages 18-24, to advocate for the protection of traditional lands, waterways, and sacred sites and supports youth-led change through culturally competent curriculum, intergenerational learning spaces. Ambassadors work alongside community members and likeminded organizations to address how man-made disruption, climate change, and natural disasters have impacted the land beneath our feet. The inaugural class of Ambassadors focuses on the impact of uranium mining on the Grand Canyon—the traditional territories of the **Hopi**, **Havasupai**, **Southern Paiute** and **Pueblo** people.

recent desecration of sacred sites and saw firsthand how water and the wildlife will be impacted through wall construction. While meeting with **Chairman Norris**, there was discussion of how youth can advocate for their traditional lands, sacred sites and the sovereign rights of relatives on both sides of the border. "In visiting with the **Tohono O'odham** people, it is clear that the border is an artificial line drawn by those who have a desire to divide people, culture and tradition.

The **Tohono O'odham** people, whose traditional lands span across the modern states of Sonora and Arizona, deserve to have their sovereignty honored and respected and their sacred lands protected. What Americans call the border today, the **O'odham** have called home since time immemorial. To see this land yourself and to talk to the people is a blessing. The border wall that is currently being built in **O'odham** lands is not only a sacred on the land, but a direct attack on sovereignty and a new chapter in colonization" says **Nikki Pitre, Executive Director of the Center for Native American Youth**.

Similar struggles are playing out across the country as tribes fight to preserve their ability to observe their religious practices on their sacred sites. For decades, Native Hawaiians have been fighting the further development and desecration of **Mauna Kea**; most recently against the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT). **Mauna Kea**, a volcano on the island of Hawai'i, is profoundly significant in Hawaiian culture and religion. The summit is also home to close to a hundred archaeological sites and many traditional cultural properties.<sup>97</sup> Currently, thirteen telescopes and support facilities crowd the sacred landscape of **Mauna Kea** and the sacred summit is the target of increasingly aggressive industrial development.<sup>98</sup> **Kealoha Pisciotta**, president of the local organization **Mauna Kea Anaina Hou**, testified: "If we say yes to more development, we are saying yes to the desecration of our temple and our ancestors, yes to the destruction of our waters, and yes to the possible extinction of life itself."<sup>99</sup> Similar scenarios continue to play out in the movements to protect **Chaco Canyon, Bears Ears National Monument**, and the **Black Hills**.

### CLIMATE CHANGE IN INDIAN COUNTRY

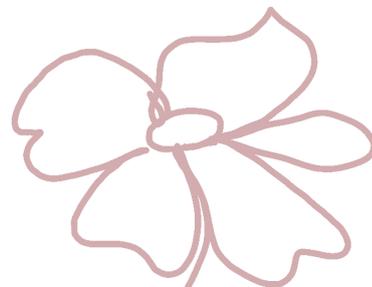
Indigenous communities across the country have already seen the impacts of climate change. With their deep cultural, spiritual, and economic ties to the land, Indigenous peoples across the globe are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Although these impacts differ by region, there are commonalities in how climate change is experienced by indigenous communities across the United States. These changes

threaten the livelihoods, sovereignty, health, and economies of Native peoples. It also threatens sacred sites, ceremonies, and practices that are foundational to Native peoples' culture and identity. Indigenous people are taking a lead role in addressing climate change. Throughout Indian Country, Tribal leaders are stepping up to adopt action plans to identify and address climate; however, institutional barriers severely limit their ability to manage and adapt to changes. On the world stage, Native youth are using their voices and turning to Traditional Ecological Knowledge to ignite action and discourse around climate change.

Climate-forced displacement has become a reality for many coastal tribes. In mid-October, 2019, the **Yup'ik village of Newtok**, Alaska was one of the first villages forced to move and abandon their communities and their traditional lands, due to the impacts of climate change.<sup>100</sup> The **Yup'ik Village**, of about 380 people, on the **Ninglick River** near the **Bering Sea** began their relocation from their traditional lands, to their new village of **Mertarvik**. Unfortunately, there are many indigenous communities across the country who are facing the reality of leaving their traditional lands due to climate change. Yet, the federal government has failed to provide the resources necessary to address the quickly changing environment.

In January, the **Alaska Institute for Justice** filed a complaint with the United Nations on behalf of the **Alaskan village of Kivalina** and four coastal tribes in Louisiana, asking for an investigation into the United States' handling of tribal nations affected by climate change.<sup>101</sup> The complaint emphasized the failure of the U.S. government to provide adequate resettlement resources to Indigenous communities, violating their human rights through repeated negligence. It cites the government's failure to relocate tribes, provide thorough consultation, to protect tribal cultural sites and to recognize tribal sovereignty. Climate-forced displacement is a reality for tribal nations in the Pacific Northwest, as well: The **Hoh Tribe**, the **Quileute Tribe**<sup>102</sup> and the **Quinault Nation**<sup>103</sup> have been working on moving to higher ground for more than a decade, as they face increased erosion, flooding and storm damage. The Pacific Northwest could see up to 2 feet of sea-level rise by 2050, as well as higher tides, a hazardous prospect for low-lying coastal communities.<sup>104</sup>

Meanwhile, tribes across the United States are experiencing reductions in access to culturally important habitats and species. Changes in the temperature and flow of water are exacerbating existing stresses on salmon and shellfish populations, which are





The Grand Canyon is the place from which we emerged and the place to which we will ultimately return in the end. As the first and true caretakers of the land, our responsibility is to protect the lands and waterways—our home-- for future generations.

*Lexie James (Hopi & Tewa)*

vital to the economic, spiritual, and cultural health of tribal communities in the Pacific Northwest. The influx of invasive species and prolonged drought are disrupting subsistence practices in the Southwest. Since the beginning of the year, 8,300 wildfires that have burned well over 4 million acres in California<sup>105</sup> as Indigenous peoples' millennia-long practice of cultural burning has been ignored in favor of fire suppression. These impacts threaten traditional knowledges, food security, water availability, historical homelands, and territorial existence, and may undermine indigenous ways of life that have persisted and adapted for thousands of years.

#### **NATIVE EARTH ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH PROGRAM**

The **Native Earth Environmental Youth Program** is a weeklong educational experience for Indigenous youth focused on land skills and environmental stewardship. Using the **Haudenosaunee** rationale of cooperation, high school students from the northeast come together to understand how scientific ecological knowledge can coexist with traditional ecological knowledge to solve environmental problems. The program uses **Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address (Kaneharatechreh)**, a central tenet of the **Haudenosaunee** way of thinking and viewing the world, to create a culturally relevant curriculum. The **2019 Native Earth Environment Youth Program** focused on scientific and indigenous perspectives on climate change. The **Haudenosaunee Confederacy** nations have experienced changes in climate that has impacted many cultural practices. The **Confederacy** hopes that engaging youth is one step to addressing these environmental issues.

#### **#LANDBACK & INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MOVEMENT**

This year has seen movements for racial, social, and environmental justice gain greater national prominence. Following the murder of **George Floyd**, nationwide protest erupted over police brutality and systemic racism. Indigenous Peoples have had their voices elevated as well, owing to a shared history of oppression, cultural stereotypes, and conflicts with the federal government. As these movements grow, Indigenous decolonization movements, like the **#LandBack** movement, are being elevated onto a national stage and are playing a critical role in affecting legal decisions and shaping public consciousness. As the country grapples with the issues of racism, police brutality, and confronting its history of colonization and white supremacy, recent court decisions have set bold new precedents that affirms the ideology central to the movement for decolonization that seeks to restore land to Indigenous people.

This year, the U.S. legal system has delivered a suite of rulings that reaffirmed Indigenous land rights and

environmental rights. On July 9, 2020, the Supreme Court ruled that 3 million acres of land, nearly half of Oklahoma, is Native American land. "[The Supreme Court's] decision is a win for Tribes and it gives a huge opportunity to reclaim inherent rights that will strengthen the Nation and ultimately empower Native youth," stated **Isabel Coronado** (Muscogee (Creek) Nation), **CNAY Youth Advisory Board** member.

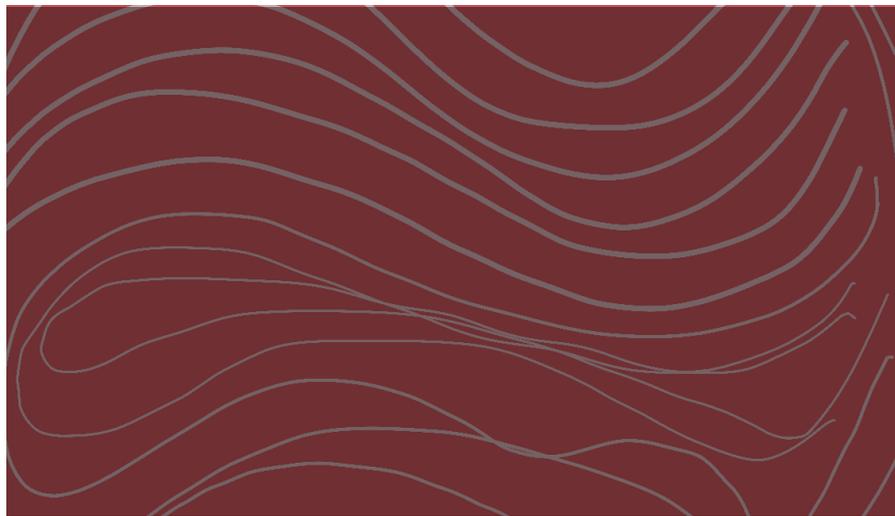
From the Virginias to the Dakotas, the courts pushed back on the industrial development that would have further imperiled tribal lands, waterways, and sacred sites. This year, the courts denied a Trump administration request to allow the construction of the long-delayed northern leg of the Keystone XL Pipeline, which would carry slurry crude from the Alberta tar sands to Nebraska. In July, a federal judge ordered that oil must stop flowing through the Dakota Access Pipeline, which runs from North Dakota to Illinois, however, a pair of appellate court decisions allowed the oil to keep flowing, pending an environmental review. Two of the United States' largest utility companies — Duke Energy and Dominion Energy — announced that, because of pending lawsuits from environmentalists, they had canceled the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which would have transported natural gas from Virginia to North Carolina.

These are welcome legal victories. But taken together, they fail to realize a complete vision of Indigenous sovereignty, racial and environmental justice, and the ideals of the decolonization movement. Indigenous movements have highlighted the profound shortcomings of the U.S. legal system in administering justice. Youth-led movements like **Idle No More** and **Standing Rock** brought Native sovereignty efforts into the national, and global, consciousness-- unleashing a cascade of uprisings against extractive industries and winning important legal battles, from victories against pipelines to securing land rights. This year's racial justice protests have brought even more visibility and awareness to Native communities. Native youth recognize that in order to realize a full vision of decolonization and the repatriation of land to indigenous people, they must continue the momentum of these social movements and build coalitions with other communities who also suffer the effects of colonization and white supremacy. Native youth across the country are joining with other communities to call amplify the call for decolonization: the abolishment of slavery in all forms and the repatriation of land and life of Indigenous peoples.

*Written by AC Locklear.*



*Dennis M. (Northern Arapaho) Description: I gather my strength from the resilience our native community has, it's been built from a long history of oppression. It has built a strong family from which I am able to confide in whenever I feel like I'm going down the wrong path. I gather my strength from my fellow native peers at University. Without them I don't know how my experience at school would've ended up because these groups of people have that same connection to their homeland/ family and it's scary at first being away but we know in our hearts it's for a strong purpose.*



# Systems Involving Youth

**It is a youth-led movement that is demanding for better policy for systems that impact us all.**

*Youth are informing others on the importance of being counted in the Census, voting deadlines, protecting the Indian Child Welfare Act, calling attention to our missing people, and our Native people who have fallen through the cracks of the justice system.*

The intricate systems involving Native youth have not been an easy system to navigate. Since the beginning, United States Government never truly meant to include our communities nor families. The lack of resources to find our missing and murder Indigenous people (MMIP), the mass incarceration of Native people, and repeated attempts to tear down the **Indian Child Welfare Act** are just some of the major systems impacting tribal communities. Native youth and results in their involvement within various systems, including local, state, federal, and especially tribal entities.

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*(Left) Christie Wildcat (Northern Arapaho) created a proclamation of Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls for Montana.*

COVID-19 has impacted our country significantly and exacerbated the inequities in our systems. The pandemic has shed light on the much-needed improvements of the systems that are supposed to serve us. But this pandemic also has taught us the interconnectedness each system has and why it is important to work coherently within all systems.

Despite these challenges, our youth are making historic triumphs and like their ancestors, they will continue to fight for their people. Through advocacy, we are seeing Native youth raising awareness, and fighting for better policies to continue strengthening their communities for future generations. Native youth are using their accounts on various platforms such as **Twitter**, **Instagram**, and **TikTok** to educate, raise awareness on issues, and call attention to ways in which they are improving their communities. Youth are using social media to inform others on the

importance of being counted in the **Census**, voting deadlines, protecting the **Indian Child Welfare Act**, calling attention to our missing people, and our Native people who have fallen through the cracks of the justice system. It is a youth-led movement that is demanding for better policy for systems that impact us all.

#### **MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

Missing and murdered Indigenous people is a crisis that impacts Indigenous people, families, and communities in the United States and across the border into Canada and Mexico directly, and the rest of society and the land indirectly. According to the **Urban Indian Health Institute**, in 2016, 5,712 cases of **Missing and Murdered Indigenous People** were reported in the United States; however, only 116 were recorded in the Department of Justice database.<sup>106</sup> Families and community members have been

tirelessly searching for their loved ones and raising awareness about the broader epidemic of their missing sisters, brothers, and two-spirit Native people. In addition to going missing or murdered, Native people are more likely to experience violence within their lifetimes at devastating rates in comparison to other ethnicities. The **National Institute of Justice** found that 84.3% of Native American and Alaska Native women will experience violence in their lifetime, while Native men also experience high rates at 81.6%.<sup>107</sup> It is important to note: these numbers are estimates, due to lack of government documentation and difficulties with jurisdiction there is no accurate account for how many Indigenous people have experienced violence or have gone missing and/or murdered. In 1994, the **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)** was passed by Congress as part of the **Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994**.<sup>108</sup> Its original adoption aimed to "improve community-defined responses" to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking crimes through multiple jurisdiction cooperation.<sup>109</sup> A vast majority of Native women experience violence by non-Natives/non-tribal members. **President Obama** signed the **Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013** with modifications to the act. The reauthorization improved protections for Native women by restoring "concurrent criminal jurisdiction to tribal governments over non-Indians having significant ties to the tribe and who commit domestic violence and dating violence against Native women in Indian country or violate protections orders."<sup>110</sup>

Native youth are working within their communities and networks to raise awareness about our missing people through sharing missing persons cases on social media, educating others on the scope of the epidemic, and getting creative with their advocacy. **CNAY 2020 Champion for Change Isabella Madrigal** (Cahuilla Band of Indians & Turtle Mountain Chippewa Indians) has written a play, **Menil and Her Heart** which integrates both traditional Cahuilla stories and the contemporary epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. She describes her work as "theater for social justice." Isabella wrote this play to help with her own healing and bring healing to others, "when our women are going missing at rates 10 times higher than the national average, you know we need to remember them. So, this play is for them, at its core it's all about that." Prior to being selected as a **2020 Champion for Change**, in 2019, **Isabella** was chosen to speak at the **United Nations' Girls Speak Out Event** to address violence against Indigenous Women.

#### **COVID IMPACT ON MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

In attempts to further address this crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People the current administration

created a task force titled "**Operation Lady Justice**". This task force aims to review cold cases across Indian Country, work with tribes to improve investigations and information sharing, and "consultation and dialogue with American Indian and Alaska Native people and leaders as part of this process."<sup>111</sup> This task force has been met with criticisms from activists stating, "Donald Trump's approval of pipelines through tribal territory contribute to the higher rates of violence by bringing outsiders to their communities."<sup>112</sup> While the task force seeks to aid in the issue of MMIP, the administration and DOJ need to work in collaboration with community members to better meet their needs.

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***"84.3% of Native American and Alaska Native women will experience violence in their lifetime, while Native men also experience high rates at 81.6%."***

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**Congresswoman Deb Haaland** (NM-1, Laguna Pueblo) has introduced legislation to further address the silent crisis. The congresswoman has introduced **The Not Invisible Act of 2019**, which "introduces measures for interagency communication, prevention efforts, specialized law enforcement training and working with tribes to combat the rising numbers."<sup>113</sup> Another federal bill called **Savanna's Act** was introduced and was blocked in 2018, but has re-emerged this year and was passed in the Senate, the bill was introduced by **Senator Lisa Murkowski** (AK). **Savanna's Act** requires the **Justice Department** to report statistics on missing and murdered Native people, develop guidelines for responses to cases, conduct outreach to tribes and Native organizations, and provide training to law enforcement agencies on how to record tribal enrollment of victims in federal databases.<sup>114</sup> Both bills were recently passed in the House of Representatives and will be moving forward to the resident's desk for his signature. A momentous moment for people in Indian Country to see the progress that so many victims, families, advocates, allies, and tribal citizens have worked towards.

**CNAY Youth Advisory Board** member and former **CNAY Champion for Change, Christie Wildcat** (Northern Arapaho) has been a long-time advocate of this epidemic. Christie created a proclamation of Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls and presented it to Wyoming Governor **Mark Gordon**. "I want to be able to make a safer environment for my younger sisters and all the younger generations of girls coming up, which is why I started my work with missing and murdered

Indigenous women and girls. Finally, I wrote the proclamation thinking of my little sisters." Upon signing this proclamation, it was announced the Governor **Gordon** would establish a task force comprised of diverse leadership from multiple organizations and communities. This group was developed to address the ways in which Wyoming can address the high rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women.<sup>115</sup> "**Governor Mark Gordon** established a task force, but due to COVID-19 we haven't been able to meet in the last few months," shares **Christie**. While she is eager to see continued progress she states, "We can't forget about our Indigenous people who are still going missing during COVID."

### INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT

Part of the intricate histories between tribes and US entities includes the **Indian Child Welfare Act** (ICWA) which was passed in 1978. This act was adopted by Congress "in response to a crisis affecting American Indian and Alaska Native children, families, and tribes."<sup>116</sup> According to the **National Indian Child Welfare Association** (NICWA), Native children were being separated from their families and communities at large numbers by both state child welfare and private adoption agencies. The study "found that 25%-35% of all Native children were being removed; of these, 85% were placed outside of their families and communities – even when fit and willing relatives were available."<sup>117</sup> **ICWA** was adopted by Congress with the intent to "protect the best interest of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families."<sup>118</sup>

The adoption of **ICWA** created protocols for state and federal agencies to follow when an Indian child is taken into custody by child welfare authorities. In the event that a child needs to be removed from their home, this act prioritizes the child(ren) going to another Native family member, if that is not an option the child(ren) would then go to another family within their tribe/community. As a third option the child(ren) would be placed with another Native family outside of their community, and only as a last resort the child(ren) would be placed with a non-Native family. The adoption of this act strengthened tribes right to exercise sovereignty, specifically when it comes to deciding membership and enrollment. For **ICWA** to apply, the children do not have to be enrolled yet – however, they must be eligible for enrollment. If there is any speculation that a child may be Native American, **ICWA** should apply until it is verified that the child is not of Native American descent.

In "**Sovereignty in Action**" an interview series conducted by the **National Congress of American Indians** (NCAI) **President Fawn Sharp** (Quinault Indian Nation) discusses issues with the implementation of

**ICWA**. **Sharp** explains **ICWA** as good legislation that is having trouble being carried out by the states. In the interview, **President Sharp** tells her experience with **ICWA**, and the process of trying to foster Native children when a state is failing to follow proper protocol.<sup>119</sup> While **ICWA** is good legislation, there is nothing from the federal government that keeps the states accountable for its implementation.

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***"When we don't have foster homes then they are sent outside of our community, and outside of Indian country, and to non-Native citizens. So, I think it's really important for us to have that ability, to set the standards for an acceptable family unit."***

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Native youth are overrepresented in the foster care system, and since **ICWA** prioritizes Native youth being placed with Native families, this results in a need for more licensed Native homes. When a child is taken into foster care, they must be placed with a licensed home. To become licensed, potential foster parents must pass courses and prove that they are able to provide good care for a foster child. It is common for Native American homes to have multiple generations in the household, which differs from a typical nuclear family. Many Native families do not try to get the licensing since they are unaware of the exceptions tribal or Native organization licensing make, such as the amount of rooms/square footage required for a state foster licensed home. **Sharp** says, "when we go through the state process, it creates a lot of barriers to licensing. And so, when we have all those barriers, we don't have as many foster homes. When we don't have foster homes then they are sent outside of our community, and outside of Indian country, and to non-Native citizens. So, I think it's really important for us to have that ability, to set the standards for an acceptable family unit."<sup>120</sup>

### COVID IMPACTS ON ICWA

**ICWA** continues to be contested in state and federal courts for being "unconstitutional" as "race-based law."<sup>121</sup> In January of 2020, the United States Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals held their oral arguments for **Brackeen v. Bernhardt**. A Federal court case between Texas, Indiana, and Louisiana supporting the **Brackeen** family against the federal government concerning the constitutionality of **ICWA**. The **Brackeen** family were the non-Native foster parents of a 2-year old boy who was part **Navajo** and part **Cherokee**, they were unable to

adopt the child according to **ICWA** protocol and brought the case to federal court.<sup>122</sup> The **Brackeen's** 2018 case was brought to the Northern district of Texas federal court, where **Judge Reed O'Connor** decided **ICWA** as unconstitutional on the grounds of the legislation being a "race-based" statute, and in violation of the 10th amendment imposing on powers that are reserved for the states.<sup>123</sup> Multiple stakeholders voiced their support of **ICWA**, including 486 federally recognized tribes, 59 tribal organizations, 26 states and the District of Columbia, 77 (bi-partisan) members of Congress, and many other Indian organizations, Native youth, stakeholders, and lawyers.<sup>124</sup> A decision on their **ICWA** challenge is delayed due to COVID, but is expected during the summer or fall of 2020.

**Autumn Adams**, a **Youth Advisory Board Member**, **2019 Champion for Change**, and a former foster care youth states, "COVID has dramatically impacted child/parent visits, youth who are ageing out during the pandemic are facing housing insecurity, and the rise of abuse cases going underreported." She believes the **Family First Prevention Services Act** will help aid in the trauma children are facing in the foster care system. The act would aid in prevention resources for children to stay with their families, tracking and preventing child maltreatment, and creation of grants to ensure children are financially supported.<sup>125</sup> Our children are our future and deserve to be supported, uplifted, and have quality care.

### THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

According to **2010 Census** data, the incarceration rate for Native people in prisons and jails was 1,291 per 100,000 people, which was more than twice the rate for white Americans.<sup>126</sup> Native men are incarcerated at a rate of 4 times that of white males and Native women are incarcerated 6 times more than white females.<sup>127</sup> Overall, Native people are incarcerated 4 times the national average and 38 percent above average per capita.<sup>128</sup> Alarming statistics show that while Native youth are 1 percent in the US, but make up 70 percent of federal prisons for juveniles and are transferred as youth to adult facilities at 18 times the rate of white youth.<sup>129</sup>

Like other data sets that include the Native American population, it is safe to assume that incarcerated Native people are undercounted due to barriers. Some of the barriers that lead to the undercounting of Native people in the criminal justice system include the slow evolution of the Department of Justice, overlapping jurisdictions, no distinction between tribes, voluntary reporting and socioeconomic barriers.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, the number of jail facilities in Indian Country increased from 68 in 2004 to 80 in 2016.<sup>131</sup>

One reason for the increase is that the federal government overrules tribal jurisdiction. This means that Native people are subject to serving for longer sentences than they would under tribal jurisdiction. Native people make up the majority in federal prisons because the governments continual overturn of tribal sovereignty and tribal jurisdiction. Consequentially, this determines the outcome of their sentence and, ultimately, where they will be forced to spend their sentence. While Native people are held in federal custody they are subjected to be moved anywhere throughout the United States leaving behind their tribal communities and culture, their families and children and straining those relationships (you can read more about the barriers that Native youth who face parental incarceration by following **Isabel Coronado**, a **2018 Champion for Change** and **Youth Advisory Board member**, at [www.thenext100.org](http://www.thenext100.org)). Family separation through the legal system is a silent epidemic that has been generationally impacting tribal communities. While there is no national data, Native youth in Oklahoma are 2 times more likely than white youth to have an incarcerated parent and in the Dakotas 5 times more likely to have incarcerated parents.<sup>132</sup>

### COVID IMPACTS ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The livelihoods of those who are incarcerated are of particular concern since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been warned time and time again on how jails and prison are breeding grounds for the spread of the virus. While incremental change has happened by federal prisons releasing 1,027 incarcerated people, which is 1 percent of the 174,000 people in the system, others have been sent to a death sentence.<sup>133</sup> In early April, the first female in federal prison died because of COVID related complications. Her name was **Andrea CircleBear**, a citizen of **Cheyenne Sioux River** tribe, she was transferred from her home state of South Dakota to a federal facility in Texas.<sup>134</sup> She left behind five children, one in which she recently gave birth to prior to her death.

Many family members including children, mothers, grandmothers, aunties, and uncles have to live day to day anticipating they will get the call. The call that their loved one has contracted the respiratory virus. We know that we and many other families and advocates are eager to see more movement on the release of incarcerated people. There is no current Tribal specific legislation to aid in the decarceration of Native people, there is however movement to decarcerate prisons currently due to the pandemic. States like California and New York have released people who are non-violent and pose no risk to public safety.<sup>135</sup> William Barr directed the federal prisons to release people who show minimal recidivism threat, but this has been met with criticism



*Camela M. (Navajo)*

*Description: In my painting, I used vibrant colors to illustrate the beauty of nature on Navajo Land. The rocks range from reds, yellows, and browns. In the distance, the mesa appears blue and purple. All over the land, desert plants sporadically grow in the sand and rocks. I am surrounded by nature and beauty. I illustrated myself holding a paint brush and Navajo botanical book to show that art and plants pushed me to immerse me in my culture. Art and my high school education initiated me to learn my identity as a Navajo woman.*

from advocates stating the algorithm that will be used to choose the people who get released will bend toward White incarcerated people's release from federal prisons.<sup>136</sup>

**Representative Ruth Buffalo** from the 27th district in the North Dakota legislator, an advocate for public health and criminal justice reform stated, "There continues to be stigma and shame surrounding incarceration," she goes on to say, "families do not talk about the past traumas they have experienced and therefore the generation after them are experiencing those same traumas without any real progress in this area." While mass incarceration continues to persist in our tribal communities, we need to find and create

solutions that aim to reduce the number of Native people incarcerated with added resources to mental health, substance abuse treatment, and support for children and families.

Native youth are navigating these complex and interconnected systems with strength and resilience. Despite insurmountable challenges, youth are committed to carry forward on the work generations have led before them. It is important for Native youth to remain active in these various systems to ensure their voice and community needs are heard.

*Written by Isabel Coronado.*



# COVID-19 Policy Timeline

**This pandemic has served to highlight the true strength and resilience of Indian Country.**

*We have witnessed social distance powwows, beading, time with families, receiving teachings, preparing traditional food, relearning the importance of community even though social distancing.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken us to the core of our understanding of what is considered normal for any of us. Schools and universities across the country shut their doors, businesses closed, the economy plummeted, household essentials disappeared, masks became mandated, the loss of family members and teachings, we faced a series of unknowns. The pandemic ravaged **Black, Indigenous, People of Color** (BIPOC) communities across the country while highlighting the insufficient resources and services, like healthcare, access to clean water, stable housing, food, transportation, and other basic human rights. This resulted in the need for legislative action to mitigate the current and lasting impacts of the pandemic.

*Written by Autumn Adams (Yakama Nation), 2019 Champion for Change.*

*Royce J. (Chippewa Cree Blackfeet) Description: I made a buckskin face mask with a horse mask attached to it. On both sides of the mask, horsehair is hanging and two beaded ropes with size 11 cut beads. It is also beaded down the center and has studs around it. The mask represents protection and strength. I made the mask because, I love riding horses and due to COVID I didn't get to ride any horses this year and go to Sundance and pray with the horse nation. I'm a Native Youth and this is how it connects to me and gives me strength through COVID*

“

**“Just like our ancestors, Native people continue to be resilient.”**



NavajoHopiGoFundMe volunteers.

#### December 31, 2019

- Chinese officials in Wuhan, China's Hubei province, confirmed dozens of cases of pneumonia with an unknown cause.<sup>137</sup>

#### January 7, 2020

- The outbreak was identified as a new strain of Coronavirus.<sup>138</sup>

#### January 21, 2020

- The U.S. confirmed the first coronavirus case in Washington state.<sup>139</sup>

#### January 30, 2020

- World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a global public health emergency as more than 9,000 cases were reported worldwide.<sup>140</sup>

#### February 11, 2020

- WHO announced the official name of the disease to be COVID-19.<sup>141</sup>

#### February 29, 2020

- The first recorded coronavirus death in the U.S., in Washington state.<sup>142</sup>

#### March 6, 2020

- The Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2020
- P.L. 116-123<sup>143</sup>

#### March 18, 2020

- Families First Coronavirus Response Act P.L. 116-127<sup>144</sup>
- Division A: Supplemental Appropriations: USDA, DOD, Treasury, HHS, VA
- Divisions B- G: Provisions for:
  - § Waivers for food and nutrition program
  - § Emergency family and medical leave
  - § Emergency unemployment insurance
  - § Emergency paid sick leave
  - § Coverage of Covid-19 testing
  - § Employer tax credits for paid sick and emergency leave

#### March 27, 2020

- Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act P.L. 116-136<sup>145</sup>
- Division A includes, but not limited to the paycheck protection program and emergency disaster loans, coverage of testing and preventative services for covid-19 patients, support for health care providers servicing medically underserved populations, requirements and reimbursement for certain services under Medicare

and Medicaid; eviction and forbearance provisions for properties with federally backed mortgages, and extensions of authorizations for certain health and human services programs.

- Division B: Supplemental appropriations include, but not limited to, the DOD, USDA, HHS, Institute of American Indian and Alaska Native Culture and Arts Development, Department of Education, the EPA, and Department of Justice.

#### April 24, 2020

- Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act P.L. 116-139.<sup>146</sup>
- Division A: Provisions related to the paycheck protections program and economic injury disaster loans made in response to COVID-19.
- Division B: Supplemental appropriations to HHS and SBA.

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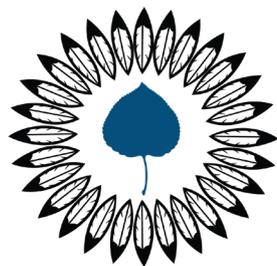
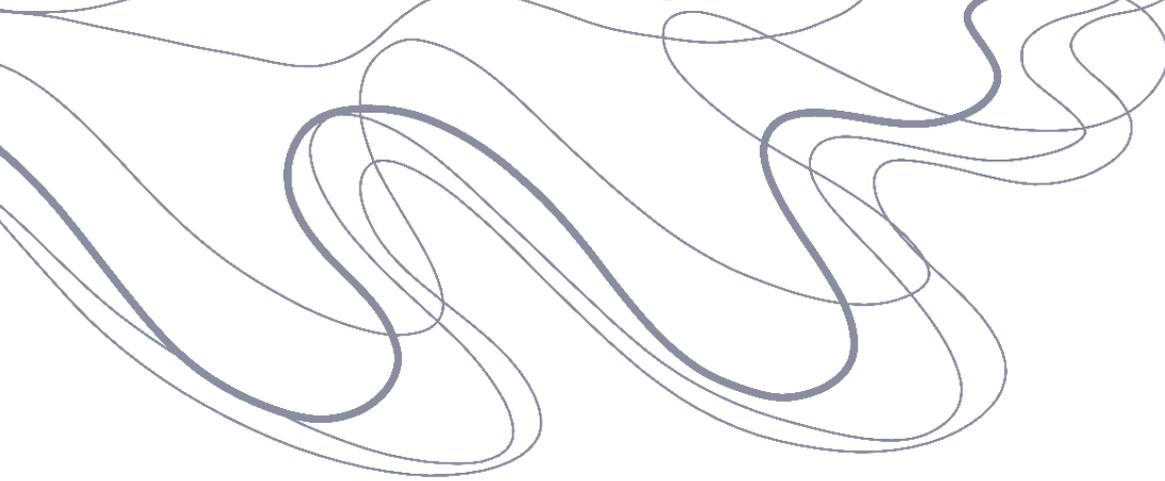
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