

2017 STATE OF NATIVE YOUTH REPORT

OUR IDENTITIES AS CIVIC POWER



CENTER FOR NATIVE
AMERICAN YOUTH
AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

STATE OF
NATIVE
YOUTH
2017



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



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November 2017

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



Front cover art by **Lena Wright**, *Yurok Tribe*.

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FOREWORD

by Nancy Deere-Turney, Muscogee (Creek) Nation

Native Americans were civically engaged before the term was coined or trending. Our identity is such a beautiful subject. People confuse identity with properties and the face value of individuals, but for us it is much more holistic.

Civic engagement is roughly defined as fulfilling your role as a citizen in community and trying to make life better for everyone. What does that look like in **Indian Country**? I asked myself this question, and tried to imagine what this looked like hundreds of years ago, but also for today. We don't have words for civic engagement in our language, although roughly I thought Mvskoke would be pretty close. I am a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and Mvskoke is the traditional spelling of our people. When thinking about what defines civic engagement, all the descriptors were attributions that my people had, have, and I hope to continue to embody into the future. When I think of identity, I think of it on a more holistic level. I was raised with the understanding that my identity and spirituality walk hand in hand together. For me, my spirit is lifted when I hear our traditional Creek hymns, or when I go visit a ceremonial ground and dance with them. When my spirit is lifted, my identity becomes strengthened. There are 567 federally recognized **tribes** in the country, and identity and spirituality is defined differently in each community. We have a general understanding that our identity is who we are, not what we look like. Our identity is composed of culture, language, ceremonies, and community. Those attributes help us understand who we are as a tribe, but they also strengthen us spiritually, and help us grow individually. Native youth are stepping up, engaging, and learning their customs and traditions in different ways and at different times, but the important part is, that we are doing it.

Being Mvskoke means being a part of something bigger. It means working together and helping each other for the welfare of all our people. Our tribe itself is a confederation of all of our tribal towns who came together with the purpose of survival. It wasn't hip to be #engaged, it was our lifestyle, and still is.

Four hundred years ago, you would have seen our people working to make sure the whole community was fed, sheltered, and protected. You would have seen our youth being educated by our elders. They would be learning how to listen, lead, cook, hunt, fish, and basic survival tips. The youth would be constantly stepping up to help their community in many roles involving leadership and support. That is what civic engagement originally was. Today civic engagement can still be seen in Native communities, but a little differently. We are still stepping up, but in many more roles. Times have changed, and we have had to adapt to them.

Our ceremonial dances for my tribe last from around midnight to sunrise, and most of the time children don't stay up all night. The first time I stayed up all night, I was twelve and I danced every dance. I was exhausted and couldn't feel my feet by the last dance. I was so proud of myself for dancing that last dance with the women, that I made a promise to myself to become just like those women that raised me. I wanted to be strong and able to dance all night after camping, just like those women. I guess I was thinking too much after that last dance, because I fell asleep in my chair during the last speech, and no one could get me to wake up. My dad had to carry me out of the ring, and took me back to the camp to sleep. I remember that night like it was yesterday because that was my first time committing to stepping up. I stepped up so my elders could slow down.



My friend Sam Schimmel, *Kenaitze/St. Lawrence Siberian Yupik*, not only goes out hunting and berry picking in his community, he takes other youth, so that they learn how to live off the land, just as their Alaska ancestors did. He is constantly lobbying for the preservation of his tribe's hunting rights. My friend Mariah Gladstone, *Blackfeet and Cherokee Nations*, has created a cooking miniseries called *IndigiKitchen*. On the episodes you can find many indigenous recipes and learn how indigenous people used to prepare food. My friend Faith Holyan, *Navajo Nation*, is combating youth suicide with #CodePurple, a social media campaign that is saving lives. My friend CJ Francis, *Passamaquoddy Tribe*, is involving his elders and making sure the youth are still learning from them, as we always have. I don't say this enough, but my brothers and sisters that I have mentioned are some of my role models. They remind me to be better, and do better.

I have been blessed with a great community and family that values our traditions. Not everybody has this, and this is why the work Native youth are doing is so important. We need to continue to uplift and educate one another because it is the core of "civic engagement" and "Native Identity." Fads come and go, but I am so glad that our indigenous characteristics have never left. You will never find one definition for identity when it comes to our indigenous people, but that is what makes it all beautiful. You don't have to be the president or chair of your youth council or organization to be a leader. Leadership itself isn't defined by a title, it's defined by the product of the work you have done. Be a member of your youth council, be the next chair, be the next Champion for Change, be whatever you want to be, but most importantly be involved. If you want change, be the change. Step up and step into the roles our ancestors gave their lives for us to have. It's our time, and I can't wait to see who does what.

Nancy Deere-Turney is a 2017 Center for Native American Youth Champion for Change, recognized for starting her own initiative focused on cultural preservation called the Youth Enrichment Camp (YEC). A former Junior Miss and Miss Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Nancy is actively involved in her tribe's government, and plans to run for elected office for her district's National Council.

FOREWORD

by U.S. Senator Al Franken

When I first arrived in the U.S. Senate in 2009, I requested a seat on the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, chaired by Senator Byron Dorgan of North Dakota at the time. I wanted to follow in the footsteps of my friend and hero, former Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone, who had used his seat on the Committee to push the United States to uphold our treaty obligations to our Native communities, and to give young people in those communities the health care, housing and the educational opportunities that all young people need to succeed. While it was often an uphill fight, Paul never backed away from it.

In doing so, Paul inspired scores of young people like Leanne Littlewolf and her younger sister Nevada Littlewolf from the Leech Lake Band in Northern Minnesota. Before Paul tragically died in a plane crash 15 years ago, he urged them to run for office and to be active in their communities. Inspired by his call to civic engagement, they've built their careers around serving others.

Today Leanne works for the American Indian Community Housing Organization in Duluth, Minnesota, and Nevada has been an elected member of the Virginia, Minnesota City Council for more than a decade. Nevada also established a nonprofit focused on growing women's leadership in rural and indigenous communities.

These extraordinary sisters are examples of how young people use civic engagement to improve their communities and change lives for the better. Their successful work is now inspiring others.

A YOUNG PERSON'S COURAGEOUS CALL FOR CHANGE

Early in my first term, Chairman Dorgan agreed to my request to hold an Indian Affairs Committee hearing on the White Earth Reservation in Northwest Minnesota to discuss the shamefully dilapidated state of school buildings and other facilities that serve Native American populations. The run-down condition of schools has been a problem for decades, not only in my state, but across the country.

At the hearing, Tribal leaders, building experts, and federal government officials cited facts and figures to illustrate the ongoing frustrations we've long faced in trying to secure adequate funding to replace the country's long list of dilapidated Indian schools.

It was then that a very poised and courageous high school senior named Lindsey White stepped up to testify and put a human face on the problem. "If education is a priority, why has nothing improved in our high school building after so many years?" she asked. "I want to say we deserve a building that is secure and safe. Our education is just as important as anyone else's."

Her entire life she had attended the Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig school, housed in a former pole barn and one time auto-body shop. Students and teachers had to endure freezing classrooms, leaky ceilings and doors, faulty electrical and air systems, exposed wiring, mold, and sewer backups. It was disgraceful, and the conditions made it almost impossible for Lindsey and her classmates to learn.

Not a single official, including me, left that hearing without remembering the power of Lindsey's words.

Just as Paul Wellstone inspired Leanne and Nevada Littlewolf to action, Lindsey White inspired me to do what I could to allow future students to have the quality school and learning environment that every student deserves.

I later visited the school, and began a long push for the funding necessary to replace it. In 2014, I convinced President Obama's Interior Secretary Sally Jewell – who oversaw funding for Indian schools – to not only increase support for Indian school construction, but to actually visit the school and to see firsthand its deplorable conditions.

Last year, I proudly attended the groundbreaking ceremony at the site of the future Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig High School on Leech Lake Indian Reservation. The new building, which will open in 2018, was made possible because of the work of many people. But, I'll always remember Lindsey's contribution and the voice she gave to the hundreds of students, their teachers, and their entire community who wanted, and needed change.

I know that Lindsey is not alone. As you'll see in this report, Native young people all across this country are standing up in creative ways to make their futures better – and in turn – improve their communities and our country. In these divided times, we need their civic engagement more than ever.

U.S. Senator Al Franken is the junior United States Senator for Minnesota. First elected to the Senate in 2008, and re-elected in 2014, he currently sits on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee; the Judiciary Committee; the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and the Committee on Indian Affairs.





CONTENTS

Introduction & Executive Summary	11
Health and Wellness	16
Systems Involving Youth	26
Education and Jobs	32
Sacred Sites, Lands, and Waterways	40
Appendix	49
Glossary	50
About the Gen-I Survey	52
About the Cover Art	54
About Us	55



INTRODUCTION & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Erik R. Stegman

“Being Native in this generation is about reviving lost culture, keeping it within our hearts, and moving past negativity towards something positive.”

LENA WRIGHT, YUOK TRIBE,
2017 STATE OF NATIVE YOUTH REPORT COVER ARTIST

The topic of civic engagement is receiving a lot of attention in the United States today. We are involved in one of the most challenging and divisive dialogues about who we are as a nation in the modern era. We’ve seen political institutions uprooted that seemed like unquestionable norms only months ago. And in response, young people across the country are organizing and mobilizing to define what they want as citizens, as community members, and as the holders of their culture and traditions.

We believe in the power of young people to lead us to a better future.

A cornerstone of our work at the Center for **Native American** Youth (CNAY) is direct engagement with Native **youth** and their communities. Even in these challenging times, our team is more motivated than ever—because Native youth showcase the resilience of their ancestors every day. Our nations and communities have faced countless political, governmental, and systemic threats since the beginning of the colonial era. Our relatives were forcibly taken from their families and placed in abusive boarding schools where our culture

became a sin. The federal government terminated our status as Native nations. Our children were removed from our communities through the foster care system. And too often, ignoring treaty responsibilities has become more of a norm than honoring them. This is only to name a few. While we have faced many challenges, each generation has drawn on the strength of our cultures to organize, to heal, and to work toward a stronger future in our tribal communities.

Native youth are building civic power the way their ancestors always have—in keeping with their identity and culture. The State of Native Youth report is one of the ways we share what we learn about the remarkable work of these inspiring young Native leaders across the country each year. Young people have organized to build power and confront issues as wide ranging as police violence, the environment, immigration, and women’s and LGBTQIA+ rights. Native youth have been part of all of these struggles, but have built their own civic power together to protect and strengthen their culture, improve their communities’ health, and

See Glossary on page 50 for a definition of highlighted **terms**.



Civic Engagement in Action: 2017 CNAY Champion for Change Samuel Schimmel, *Kenaitze/St. Lawrence Island Yupik* (right), meeting with U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski (left) about his priorities as an Alaska Native youth. Senator Murkowski also serves on CNAY's Board of Advisors.

ensure that our Native nations are strong into the future.

Last year, we launched our first national online survey of Native youth – the **Generation Indigenous (Gen-I)** Online Roundtable Survey – to better understand the kinds of resources they need to reduce their barriers to success. We also sought to learn about the kinds of programs that are working well to meet the needs of Native youth. We will be sharing results throughout this report from our second annual survey of Native youth between the ages of 18–24. We asked respondents to tell us what the top three issues are that face them as a young person in their community. As with last year, culture and language (58% of respondents) was clearly the top priority for Native youth. As we will explore throughout this report, this is because Native youth know that their culture is the foundation for success—whether it's healthcare, education, economic development, or public safety. The other notable top issues were education (43%), getting employed or preparing for a job (35%), and mental and emotional health (33%).

In this report, we share what we've learned throughout the country from Native youth

themselves about the key issues that matter to them, what's being done to tackle their challenges and barriers to success, and some of the innovative ways they're partnering with their communities to build resilience and leadership. While we explore a range of issues, these are some of the key discussions that emerged from our work this year.

MAKING SCHOOLS SAFE, SUPPORTIVE, AND CULTURALLY-AFFIRMATIVE PLACES TO LEARN

Every year, we hear about the need to improve the school climate from Native youth across the country. We hear it in applications for our Champions for Change program. We hear it in roundtables. And, we heard it loud and clear in our online survey. Communities of color across the country are struggling with schools that are less of a place to learn and more of an early gateway into the criminal justice system—the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Native youth are part of this trend, through their stories and in the statistics. Overall, **American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN)**

students represent 2 percent of out-of-school suspensions and 3 percent of expulsions—even though they only represent less than 1 percent of the student population.¹ The situation is even worse in specific states. According to a recent analysis by the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the expulsion rates for AI/AN students in Montana, New Mexico, and Oklahoma have nearly doubled since 2012.²

In addition to discipline disparities, we know that Native students often feel unsafe in their schools. Again, the situation is even worse in some states with high populations of Native students in schools. According to the 2015 Arizona Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, Native students in that state are more than twice as likely to report absence from school due to feeling unsafe.³

One of the ways to make schools more safe and supportive is to improve culturally-relevant curricula and programming. When respondents to our survey were asked what they need to help combat racism in their schools, the leading response (86 percent) was to provide opportunities to educate non-Natives in or near their community about Native cultures. Whether it's racist mascots and stereotypes in schools, curriculum that doesn't reflect local tribal history and culture, or a lack of opportunities for Native students to share culture and support one another—these all have impacts on their school climate. In addition to positive cultural supports for Native students, more research needs to be developed to understand school discipline disparities for this population as part of the larger effort to reduce school pushout and the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH DATA AND TACKLING THE OPIOID CRISIS

This fall, CNAY held a policy and resource roundtable with Native youth and key stakeholders to discuss strategies to improve the collection, coordination, analysis, and use of mental health

data in tribal communities. A key reason for the founding of our center is the epidemic of suicide among Native youth. In too many communities we visit, the majority of young people have someone close to them who has attempted or completed suicide. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among Native youth between the ages of 10–24.⁴ The availability of quality data is a serious challenge across-the-board for tribal communities. Without the right data, we cannot properly understand the unique reasons that so many young people are attempting to take their lives, especially at the local level, and we cannot develop effective interventions. One of the most important ways we can support better data is through coordination. There are 12 tribal epicenters that collect tribal-level data.⁵ More needs to be done to coordinate these epicenters with state and federal agencies, health professionals, and other key stakeholders.

The opioid crisis was another serious issue raised repeatedly at this roundtable—and it echoed what CNAY is hearing across the country from youth and service providers. More national attention is finally being given to the rates of overdose-related deaths due to opioids, mainly in the form of prescription pills or heroin. Native populations are some of the most severely affected. In 2014, Native Americans died from opioid overdoses at a rate of 8.4 per 100,000—the highest of any other ethnic group. For heroin use, they fell just behind their white counterparts.⁶ Approximately 1 in 10 AI/AN youth ages 12 or older used prescription painkillers for nonmedical reasons in 2012, compared with 1 in 20 Non-Hispanic Whites and 1 in 30 African Americans, according to the CDC.⁷ As the new administration develops its plan to combat this crisis sweeping the nation, tribal communities must be properly included. As we heard at the roundtable, there are serious intersections between this level of abuse and broader mental health challenges. In many cases, we heard from tribal first responders and service providers that some of the deaths in tribal communities might end up being misclassified, as there is likely a strong intersection between suicide attempts and opioid abuse.⁸

SACRED SITES, LAND, AND CIVIC IDENTITY

Perhaps one of the greatest demonstrations of Native civic power and identity last year was the demonstration at the Standing Rock Sioux **reservation** to protest the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline. By coming together through a simple civic action—running thousands of miles to deliver a petition in Washington, DC—a small group of Native youth helped spark major international attention on sacred sites and waterways. Though the protest ended in the disheartening completion of the pipeline, the event itself has had tremendous implications for tribal organizing. Across the country, new initiatives, coalitions, and organizations have emerged—mostly led by youth.

“After Standing Rock, there is a true indigenous renaissance taking place. Native youth were inspired by the gathering of Nations and are now organizing through community initiatives across the country.”

**JOHN HENRY,
STUDENT, NATIVE AMERICAN
COMMUNITY ACADEMY**

Native youth are leading efforts across the country to strengthen and revive their culture, and the protection of sacred sites is especially critical to this work. While a lot of progress has been made in the past several years, serious new threats have emerged. Of particular note is the fight over Bears Ears. For years, a large coalition of thirty tribes and organizations have organized to protect this 1.35 million-acre area in southeastern Utah that contains thousands of sacred sites and artifacts. President Obama declared it a national monument in 2016 at the end of his term, but the new administration has already proposed shrinking it.⁹

Tribal communities also continue to find themselves on the front lines of climate change. As we outline in our *Sacred Sites, Lands and Waterways* chapter, **tribes** face a variety of threats to their way of life depending on their region. In the Pacific Northwest, rising water temperatures are threatening cold-water salmon populations—a staple to their way of life, nutrition, and economy.¹⁰ In other places like Alaska, tribal communities are facing threats to the very existence of their home. Due to rising temperatures and melting permafrost, Native Alaskan villages like Newtok are at serious risk. For communities like this, it’s no longer a matter of protecting their current home, but how to mitigate the situation and relocate. Villages like this are in need of financial resources and other assistance to be able to keep their community and lifeways together in a relocation.¹¹

BUILDING A NEW CIVIC FUTURE IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

These are only some of the ways that Native youth are organizing and advocating on the issues that matter to them. While achieving full success for any of these movements requires serious and often daunting systems change, Native youth aren’t letting that overwhelm what they can do right now in their communities. They’re reaching out to one another—and other communities—to build power. No matter what the issue, the most important thing we can all do to support Native youth in their efforts is to honor their culture and provide them with the tools and resources necessary to strengthen and carry that culture forward. This identity is their civic power—and it’s why we’re all confident in a strong future for tribal communities.

(Endnotes)

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PREVENTING SUICIDE AND PROMOTING STRONG MENTAL HEALTH

In too many communities across the country, one of the disheartening motivations for Native youth to step up and get involved is the suicide crisis. In some roundtable discussions we have with youth, the majority of the participants raise their hand when asked if they know someone who has attempted to commit suicide. In 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that AI/AN people experience a higher suicide rate than any other ethnic/racial group.¹ Among AI/ANs between 10 and 34 years old, suicide is the second leading cause of death, and the suicide rate for this age group is one and a half times the national average.² In 2012, the CDC reported that 15 percent of AI/AN adolescents had attempted suicide, compared to six percent of non-Hispanic whites of the same age.

Studies show that social isolation, feelings of hopelessness, and exposure to suicidal behavior are among the many risk factors for Native youth attempting or completing by suicide.³ Research also shows that having a friend who attempted suicide makes Native youth between 11 and 20 years old more likely to consider suicide themselves. AI/AN youth who live on reservations, where there is considerable exposure to suicide, are predicted to be at higher risk for contagion, known as “suicide clusters”.⁴ Additional suicide risk factors include being overweight, interaction with the justice and child welfare systems, history of non-suicidal self-injury, and identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, among others.⁵ Additionally, AI/AN youth and their development are often impacted by historical trauma shared by earlier generations related to experiences of colonialism, wars, dislocation from land, and separation from family by Indian boarding schools and the child welfare system.⁶

Mental illness in AI/AN populations is associated with the experience of historical and intergenerational trauma, and amplified by co-

When most Americans think about civic engagement, “health and wellness” may seem like an unlikely priority. For Native youth, it’s one of the first topics we hear about when we ask how they’re organizing and what they’re doing in their communities. In our online survey, 21 percent of respondents ranked physical health as a top priority, and 33 percent ranked mental health among their top three priorities.

As with the other topics we discuss throughout this report, culture is the foundation to civic engagement. In order to create a healthier future for Native youth, we must then focus on the holistic solutions they’re promoting—because the power of those solutions comes from strengthening and rebuilding culture.

CNAY 2017 Champion for Change, Sam Schimmel, *Kenaitze/St. Lawrence Island Siberian Yupik*, demonstrates this interconnectedness every day in his work to connect other youth in his community with traditional subsistence skills and teachings from his elders about their land. As he explains: “Losing or not having tradition leaves an empty space that gets filled too often with poor choices. If we are listening to our elders, dancing, drumming, hunting, and picking berries, we are not drinking or doing drugs, and our traditions stay strong.” Sam’s civic engagement is also the work of a healer.

In this chapter, we examine several of the key health and wellness challenges that impact Native youth in their communities according to what we hear directly from them throughout the year. While we may separate some of these challenges in a Western context, the effectiveness of the solutions—and how Native youth advocate for those solutions—must be understood through an indigenous worldview.

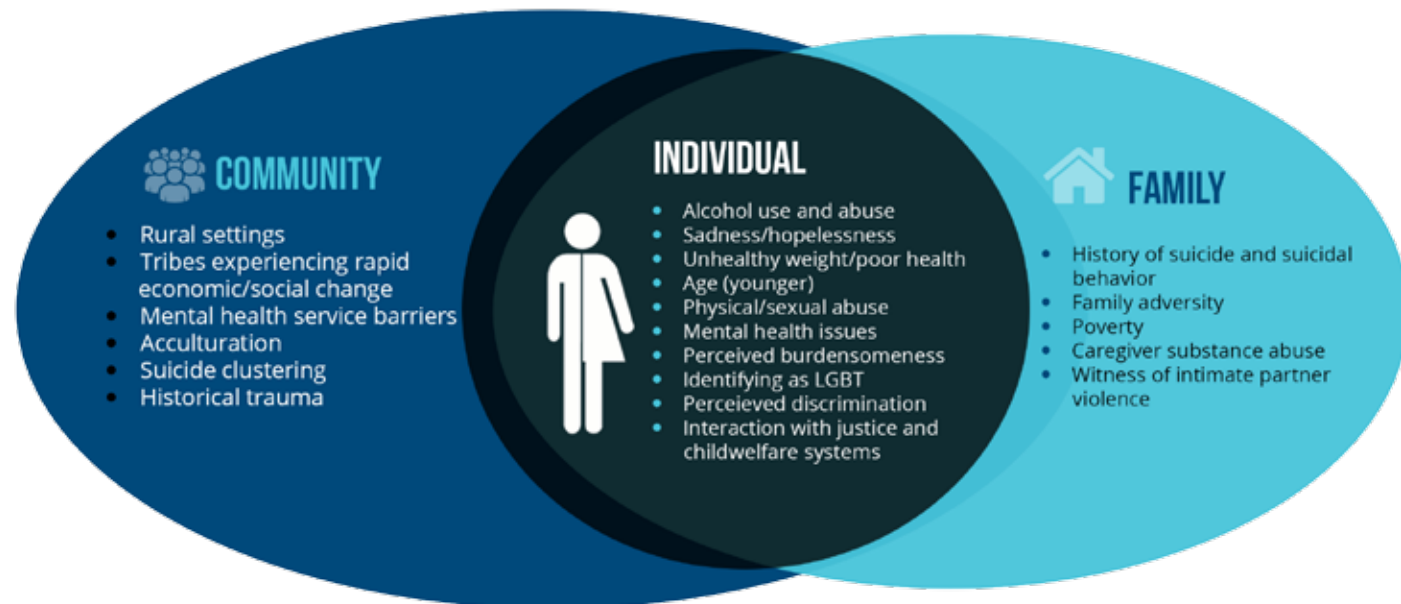
CHAPTER ONE

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Amber Richardson & Josie Raphaelito

Gen-I Ambassadors Maka Monture, *Tlingit/Mohawk* (left), and Rory Wheeler, *Seneca Nations of Indians* (right), facilitating a workshop at the 2nd Annual Youth Suicide Prevention Summit hosted by the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community in Washington state.

AI/AN ADOLESCENT SUICIDE RISK FACTORS



Source: Patel, J. (2015). American Indian/Alaska Native adolescent suicide risk factors, protective factors, and prevention opportunities in education settings: An annotated bibliography. (A report from the West Comprehensive Center). San Francisco, CA: WEST. Zanjani Kapoor, Aina; Conine, A.; Nelson, Cristofina; Barbosa-Limer, Katherine A.; Conroy, Leslie R.; Walker, and Andrea S. Buchwald. "Suicidal Ideation in American Indian/Alaska Native and White Adolescents: The Role of Bullying, Exposure to Suicide, and Overweight." *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 23, no. 4 (2015): 86-100. doi:10.5820/aian.2304.2015.86. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, (PHS) Office of the Surgeon General and National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action. Washington, DC: HHS, September 2012.

occurring conditions like depression and alcohol or substance abuse.⁷ For some Native youth, Indian Health Service (IHS) hospitals and clinics are their only options for accessing mental healthcare. Persistent underfunding and understaffing of IHS facilities results in scarce treatment centers, and months-long wait times that create significant barriers to youth attempting to get the help they need, especially in times of crisis. In our survey, Native youth said the top resource they need to address mental health issues is more mental health clinics, therapists, and support groups in communities and schools (76%).

While this crisis represents some of the biggest community challenges in the lives of Native youth, they are also at the front lines of inspiring hope for one another and creating spaces for healing. Native communities have unique protective factors. AI/AN elders exhibit suicide rates significantly lower than other racial/ethnic groups, making intergenerational approaches to prevention

services an important strategy to consider.⁸ Connectedness to culture, spirituality, family and friends are also important protective factors that can guide prevention efforts.⁹ In our survey, Native youth prioritized culturally appropriate and traditional healing practices like access to sweat lodges, smudging, and intergenerational dialogues (71%); as well as peer support groups (69%) in battling challenges to mental health. Champion for Change Jazmyn Espinoza, *Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohican Indians*, created a peer support group called the Warriors Circle Project, where Native youth gathered to discuss issues like bullying, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other challenges that could contribute to suicidal ideation. Faith Holyan, another Champion, took a digital approach to suicide prevention by establishing #CodePurple, a social media campaign for youth in crisis.

While traditional clinical interventions and resources are a critical part of solving this crisis,

“Speaking from experience, Native youth spend much of their time online, specifically on social media. When it comes to suicide prevention, communication is critical, and social media is how we communicate today.”

FAITH HOLYAN,
NAVAJO NATION
2017 CNAY CHAMPION FOR CHANGE

we must also support and strengthen youth-led efforts. We can do this by evaluating these efforts and help to establish practice-based evidence, rather than expecting evidence-based practices—that were not developed or tested in AI/AN communities—to work effectively in Native communities.¹⁰

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CIVIC SPACE FOR TWO SPIRIT & NATIVE LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

Native youth are turning to their cultures to build a more inclusive civic space for their peers when it comes to the diversity of their identities as well. 3 percent of Gen-I Survey respondents reported an identification along the gender diversity spectrum, and 30 percent collectively identified with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. “Two-Spirit” is a contemporary term primarily used as an organizing strategy for people who identify as both indigenous to the area now known as North America, and somewhere along the sexual orientation and/or gender identity spectrum(s).¹¹ This includes Native American lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) individuals. Two-Spirit identities are tribe and culture-specific, meaning that roles vary according to each tribal nation’s historical and cultural understandings of sexuality- and gender-diverse persons.¹² Two percent of survey respondents identified specifically as Two-Spirit. 62 percent of survey respondents indicated a

desire for more programs to support Two-Spirit and Native LGBTQIA+ youth, with seven percent indicating that more support for this community is among their top three priorities. Two-Spirit Advocate Olivia Cook, *Akwesasne Mohawk*, notes that for youth identifying as Two-Spirit, the “most important thing is for [them] to feel loved and supported, and know that [they] have a respected place in our individual tribal cultures.”

CNAY partnered with the Arcus Foundation on a one-year pilot project to better understand the current landscape of resources, needs, and strengths of Two-Spirit and Native LGBTQIA+ youth. Key themes from these conversations include the need for Two-Spirit youth leadership programs, increased access to Two-Spirit and Native LGBTQIA+ educational trainings, education and engagement of national philanthropy groups that fund in these spaces, adaptation of resources like Safe Zone to Native-inclusive audiences, and story-sharing that elevates the voices and priorities of Two-Spirit and Native LGBTQIA+ youth.

More than 50 percent of Native LGBTQ students experience physical violence at school because of their sexual orientation or gender, and more than one in three reported missing class at least once a month for fear of being bullied or harassed.¹³ Largely due to colonization and the spread of Western ideologies, violent and discriminatory attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ people now pervade many tribal communities.¹⁴ However, movements to reclaim Two-Spirit identities reveal that many tribes historically practiced traditions of inclusion for sexuality- and gender- diverse community members, thereby reaffirming that theirs is a sacred and supported role in tribal history and culture.¹⁵

There is an international Two-Spirit movement across Indian Country and First Nations that uses tribal sovereignty to promote inclusivity. Tribal Nations like the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe in Connecticut, and the Cherokee Nation are among 31 other tribal nations passing legislation

in support of marriage equality.¹⁶ The Tribal Equity Toolkit helps tribal nations identify existing tribal laws that may discriminate against Two-Spirit or LGBTQIA+ people, and includes sample language to promote discussion in the education sector.¹⁷ The National Congress of American Indians created a Two-Spirit Task Force in 2016 to assist with coordination, collaboration, and outreach in Indian Country on Two-Spirit issues, including policy-based approaches.¹⁸

“Two-Spirit’ is an organizing strategy and not an identity; it is an umbrella term for those who are indigenous to Turtle Island and are LGBT. Historically, we did not throw our Two-Spirit people away, and it’s time to bring our Two-Spirit youth back into the circle.”

**HARLAN PRUDEN, CREE NATION
TWO-SPIRIT ADVOCATE**

CNAY’s one-year project helped initiate conversations, collect resources, explore partnership opportunities, and identify key leaders that can elevate the voices of Two-Spirit youth. CNAY will publish a report on project findings in early 2018. Our work with these communities has just begun.

RECLAIMING FOOD SYSTEMS AND NUTRITION

Food and food systems are another important expression of civics for Native youth. A rapidly growing movement in tribal communities across the country involves strengthening culture and government by promoting “**food sovereignty**.” Food sovereignty is commonly understood as “the right of peoples, communities and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances.”¹⁹ Examples of tribal food

sovereignty include defending treaty rights to waterways and other food sources, establishing tribally-controlled food systems and programs, banning the genetic modification of traditional indigenous foods, and promoting generational transfer of indigenous knowledge of ancestral foods.

Before European settlers arrived, Native peoples held deep relationships with the land they lived on, managing food sources and maintaining complex systems to cultivate, harvest, and trade what they hunted and gathered. U.S. federal policies, such as the forced removal of Natives to lands too poor to farm, the damming of waterways, and the near-complete eradication of the American bison caused indigenous peoples to rely heavily on government rations of flour, salt and sugar, replacing traditional plant-based and low-fat meat diets. The lingering effects of these war tactics are apparent in the myriad health disparities that still plague many Native communities.²⁰

Native children who live on or near reservation and tribal lands are more likely to be affected by type two diabetes, food insecurity and obesity, compared to all children in the U.S. of similar ages.²¹ Both AI/AN adults and children experience a higher incidence of type two diabetes than any other racial/ethnic group in the U.S.²² In fact, it is estimated that one in two Native American children will develop diabetes in their lifetime.²³ A healthful diet is a protective factor against type two diabetes, but AI/AN communities (both on and off reservation) are more likely to be in food deserts, where healthy options like fresh produce are either far away or unaffordable.²⁴ In our survey, 79 percent of Native youth say they need better access to healthy food in their communities. Today, poor economic circumstances mean that Native peoples are more likely to replace healthy options with unhealthy and processed foods or government-run commodity food programs.²⁵ The Navajo Nation’s Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2014, which taxes junk food and allocates the revenue to fund community wellness projects, is one example of a tribal policy change that promotes healthy choices through community engagement.²⁶

2017 CNAY Champion for Change Mariah Gladstone, *Blackfeet and Cherokee Nations*, presenting her plans for her web-series Indigikitchen at a leadership development workshop during Champions for Change Recognition Week in D.C.

Native youth are drawing on community resources to battle diabetes and obesity in their communities. Food sovereignty initiatives that implement local solutions – like community gardens – amplify the importance of traditional indigenous foods and reinforce self-determination among tribal nations. The University of Arkansas School of Law’s Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative runs a Native youth camp each summer that teaches young people the basics of food sovereignty, reinforces cultural and spiritual connectedness to foods, and helps youth create action plans to establish or support community-based food sovereignty efforts back home.²⁷ Champion for Change Mariah Gladstone advocates for food sovereignty through her original online cooking show, Indigikitchen, which aims to get viewers excited about cooking with traditional, nutritious ingredients that would have been found on the North American continent prior to settlers’ arrival.²⁸ At the tribal level, the Shakopee Mdewakanton’s partnership with the American Heart Association is helping tribes establish sustainable food systems that meet the specific needs of their unique tribal communities.²⁹

RESPONDING TO THE OPIOID CRISIS IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

As we highlight in our Executive Summary, one of the fastest-growing challenges affecting Native youth is the abuse of opioids. While public attention has grown about the broader crisis affecting America, little attention has been given to the effects in tribal communities. Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, and powerful pain relievers available legally by prescription.³⁰ The 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported an increase in opioid



abuse in Indian Country, including an increased prevalence among Native youth.³¹ AI/ANs are one of the most at-risk groups in terms of prescription opioid overdose.³²

Native youth ages 12 and older report nonmedical use of pain relievers at a rate higher than the national average (7.8 percent vs. 4.8 percent).³³ In conversations with Native youth, CNAY hears that young people sometimes abuse opioids to get high and deal with life stressors. However, they may not always fully understand the variety of dangerous side effects – including nausea, vomiting, severe allergic reactions, and death by overdose.³⁴ Evidence shows that prescription opioids are much more toxic when co-ingested with alcohol,³⁵ and additional research indicates that Native youth alcohol consumption rates are higher than rates of all substance use combined when compared to national averages.³⁶ Those who seek recovery from opioid addiction are often confronted with limited access to rehabilitation resources,³⁷ and battle severe withdrawal symptoms which can include anxiety, insomnia, cramping diarrhea, and other adverse effects.³⁸ In our survey, 63 percent of Native youth respondents indicated a need for

programs and services that address substance abuse.

Many tribal, state, and federal initiatives are being developed and strengthened to combat the opioid epidemic and protect Native youth. Tribal nations like the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and Muckleshoot Indian Tribe are investing in substance abuse case managers, developing a 24-hour call line, and creating chemical dependency services alongside long-term strategic plans.³⁹ The Indian Health Service (IHS) offers a “First Responder Naloxone Training Toolkit” to increase knowledge of how to administer naloxone, a drug used to reverse the effects of opioid overdose.⁴⁰ These trainings are also being mandated for federal prescribers.⁴¹ Other promising responses include outlining responsible prescribing practices, optimized patient monitoring, and providing early access to naloxone to treat opioid overdose.⁴² Local IHS service administrators,⁴³ tribal epidemiology centers,⁴⁴ and tribal Area Health Boards can provide more information about efforts to address opioid abuse in individual tribal communities.⁴⁵

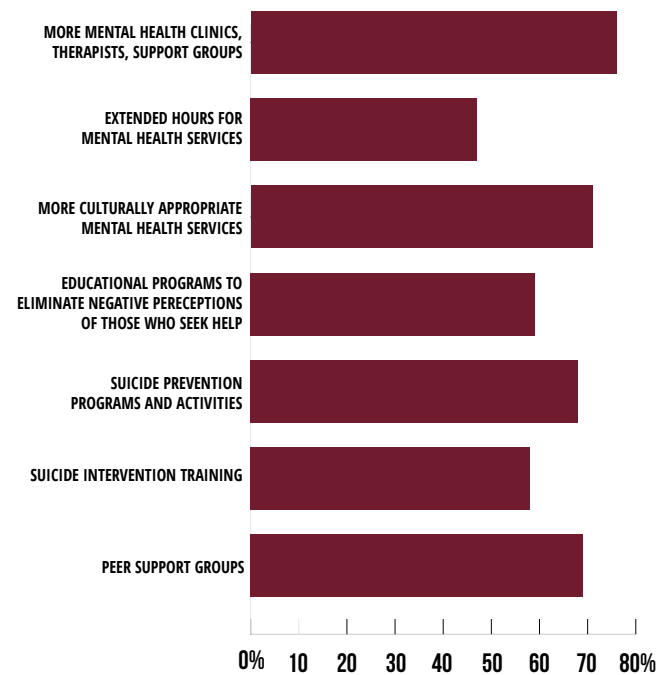
This year, CNAY held a policy and resource roundtable focused on improving mental health and interventions for Native youth. While suicide prevention was a strong focus of the conversation, so too was the impact of opioids. In many communities, opioid-related overdoses and deaths are overwhelming health and first-response systems. We also heard that much more needs to be done to understand the connection between mental health and opioid abuse. While the new administration and Congress consider strategies to invest in solving this problem, it’s critical that tribal communities and Native youth are central to these conversations.

IMPROVING DATA & RESEARCH

AI/AN people are often the “invisible” population, hidden within the asterisk or “other” groups in data sets. The challenges of adequate data collection, analysis, and reporting include small

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES NEEDED

According to Native Youth, Ages 18-24



Source: Center for Native American Youth, “National 2017 Online Youth Survey Results.”

sample or population size, large margins of error, and other issues related to statistical significance.⁴⁶ Mistrust between Native communities and researchers is another serious challenge. This is due to decades of broken promises, negative narratives from data interpretation, well-documented reports of breaches in research ethics, violations of participants’ rights, and lack of respect for cultural practices in research.⁴⁷ Furthermore, racial misclassification of AI/ANs in health data poses a significant challenge to interpreting accurate mortality rates, and thereby makes it difficult to create and implement sufficient systems and methods of care.⁴⁸ Such data is required to demonstrate community needs, and plan and evaluate prevention and intervention programs.

This is the reason we held our recent policy and resource roundtable on mental health data. While we hear the stories every day about health challenges in tribal communities, stronger data

“I need better access to data that illustrate our needs and strengths for policymakers. We need to be more visible and advocate for greater investment in tribal data capacity building.”

RORY WHEELER,
SENECA NATION OF INDIANS
NATIONAL INDIAN HEALTH BOARD
YOUTH HEALTH POLICY FELLOW

is critical to improve outcomes, but these data collection strategies must be designed and driven by tribal communities. To generate accurate, meaningful, and timely data collection in Indian Country, tribal nations are creating best public health practices through the development and accreditation of Tribal Epidemiology Centers (TECs). Twelve TECs currently exist to coordinate partnerships between tribal communities and IHS, federal agencies, state agencies, and academic institutions throughout the country to better serve Native communities.⁴⁹ At our roundtable, we heard from the TEC for the United South and Eastern Tribes (USET), which works with member tribes in its region to build capacity for the collection of this

data. One of our clearest findings was that we need more resources for coordinating these TEC’s to identify strategies to align data collection efforts, report data in meaningful and respectful ways, and contribute to broader public health intervention discussions.⁵⁰

STRONG IDENTITIES, STRONG HEALTH, STRONG COMMUNITIES

Native youth are tackling a wide range of health and wellness challenges in their communities. The solutions of these challenges cannot emerge exclusively from the systems that are often central to the problem. Though they may seem small, the efforts of Native youth to engage one another around health and wellness have big impacts that should inform and drive larger system solutions. We know this is possible because of the confidence that Native youth have in their cultures to ground these solutions. It’s what’s always worked for our communities. As tribal, local, regional, and national decisionmakers work on strategies to improve health and wellness, Native youth should be at the table.

SPOTLIGHT: WE R NATIVE

We R Native, an initiative of the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board, share health-related resources – including discussions about opioid use – that are developed specifically for Native youth through a culturally-based framework.¹ We R Native supports cohorts of Youth Ambassadors who help disseminate health-related resources to other Native youth in their communities. Ambassadors also share information about local programming, including treatment centers that engage elders and invest in Native youth, with national partners. Native youth see substance abuse escalating – especially heroine and methamphetamine, but also see more program development to combat these epidemics.

For more information, visit www.wernative.org or text “NATIVE” to 97779.

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Native youth, Felisha Howell, *Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians*, speaking at CNAY's inaugural State of Native Youth Report Release event about her perspective on the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

CHAPTER TWO

SYSTEMS INVOLVING YOUTH

Erik R. Stegman

Generations of Native people have been born into a life involved with systems and institutions. Some were designed with the specific intent of dismantling culture and encouraging assimilation. The boarding school systems in the United States and Canada were designed by the federal government with the intent to “kill the Indian to save the man” by forcibly removing children from their homes and placing them in schools where they were often abused, and where their culture and language became a sin.¹ Similarly, Native children were being removed from their homes and communities by state foster care systems at epidemic rates before the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in 1978. At the height of this crisis, 85 percent of Native children who were being removed were being placed outside of their own families and communities.² The criminal justice system, on the other hand, can too often be a haphazard maze of complicated jurisdictions, some of which aren't even equipped to meet the needs of Native youth.³

“One of the biggest hurdles to success for too many Native youth across the country are the outside systems—like foster care and juvenile justice—that involve them.”

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

For many Native youth across the country, this legacy of system involvement is a challenging part of their identity, their story, and their community's story. Improving these systems and healing from the past trauma caused by the systems is also a major driver of civic engagement for Native youth. It's another reason that the focus on culture and language must be at the center of any solutions and engagement. When we asked what kind of resources were needed to address juvenile justice in tribal communities, the highest response (75 percent) was the development of

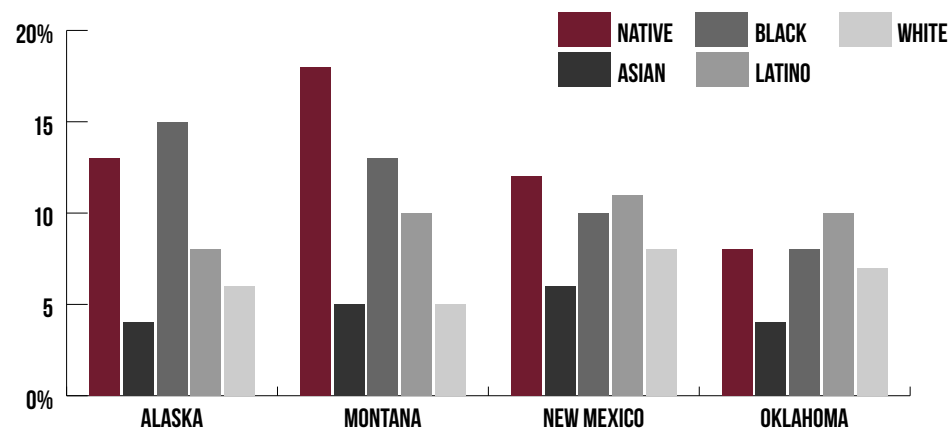
culturally-focused rehabilitation programs.⁴ When asked about the resources needed for youth in foster care, a similarly high response rate (69 percent) was to provide opportunities for Native youth in foster care to connect with their community and culture.⁵ Native youth are in the best position to advocate for improving the systems that involve them. To engage them and provide them with advocacy platforms, we must maintain a central focus on culture. Whether intentional or not, these systems have been some of the central reasons for the destruction of culture. The pathway to improving these systems and strengthening communities must then be through the reconnection to culture.

SCHOOL PUSHOUT AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Native youth are part of a national trend of other youth of color who are being disproportionately disciplined in school—particularly through suspensions and expulsions. Too often, this school pushout is also an entry point to the juvenile justice system. Overall, AI/AN students represent 2 percent of out-of-school suspensions and 3 percent of expulsions—even though they only represent less than 1 percent of the student population.⁶ Expulsions, which are a far more punitive measure, are particularly high in certain states for Native students. Expulsions in Montana, New Mexico, and Oklahoma have nearly doubled since 2012.⁷ Students in the state of Utah are 7.5 times more likely to be expelled and 8 times more likely to be referred to law enforcement than white students, according to a recent state report. Compared to other ethnic groups in Utah, Native students are expelled at the highest rate.⁸

Native students with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to serious discipline disparities in schools. Students with disabilities are already more than twice as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as students without disabilities. While Native girls have high disparities as well, the situation is very stark for Native boys with disabilities. In 2014, Native boys with

OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS OF MALE STUDENTS, 2011-2012 By Race/Ethnicity in States with Large Native Populations



Source: National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center. Analysis of Department of Education data.

disabilities received out-of-school suspensions at a rate of 29 percent—the second highest behind African American boys (34 percent). This is compared to white students with disabilities who were suspended at a rate of 12 percent.⁹ In some states with high Native populations, these disparities are particularly extreme by gender. In Montana, for instance, Native boys with disabilities face the highest suspension rate among any other group at 18 percent and are two times as likely as Native girls with disabilities to be suspended.¹⁰

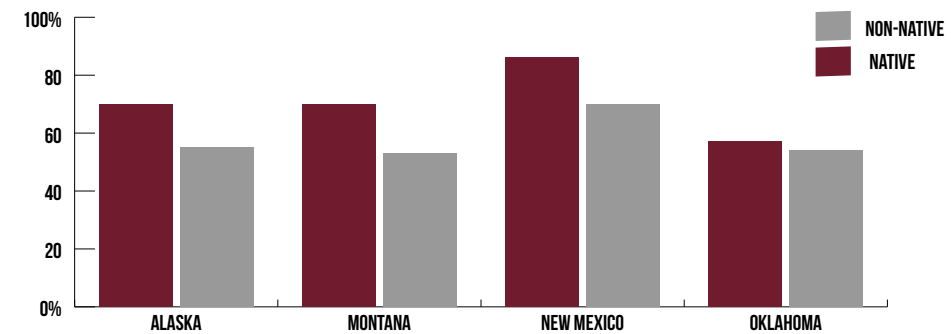
When students are referred to law enforcement, they often end up navigating systems that are ill-equipped to support them, particularly due to jurisdictional complexities—often known as a “maze of injustice.” As Arya and Rolnick explain:

When people refer to the juvenile justice “system” (i.e., law enforcement, prosecution, adjudication/conviction in courts, and corrections or sanctions) in this country, most are referring to state juvenile justice systems, where the overwhelming majority of youth in the United States are prosecuted. In contrast, Native American youth are regularly prosecuted in three distinct justice systems—federal, state, and tribal. Adding to this complexity, these youth may be transferred to the adult criminal system in all three types of justice systems in certain circumstances.¹¹

In the federal system, for instance, the detention, diversion, rehabilitation, probation and adjudication divisions do not specialize in juvenile cases. For federal judges and magistrates who adjudicate these cases, only 2 percent of their docket are juvenile cases. Native youth end up being heard in court with the rest of their dockets.¹² In addition to the lack of expertise, Native youth in these systems often end up hundreds of miles from home in federal courts and detention systems. And, depending on the case, families may sometimes end up dealing with a state magistrate at one point in the process, then a federal or tribal system in another.¹³

Improving data is key to tackling this problem. In 1992, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention began requiring the collection of minority data by state juvenile justice officials. This data is often narrowly collected for black, white and Hispanic youth, however.¹⁴ Several of the states with the largest populations of Native people have begun to collect data on Native populations in their criminal justice systems. The data shows that Alaska, Arizona, Minnesota, Montana, Oklahoma, North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin all show that Native youth are disproportionately more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system, arrested, and placed

NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE JUVENILE COMMITMENT RATES High Disparities in States with Large Native Populations



Source: National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center. 2015 Analysis of Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Data

in secured confinement compared with the white population.¹⁵

When we asked Native youth what other resources are needed to improve the juvenile justice system, the three key findings were: culturally-focused rehabilitation programs (75 percent); access to quality education while incarcerated (71 percent); and re-entry programs that help Native youth return to their schools and communities after being released (71 percent).¹⁶ As with other populations that disproportionately enter the juvenile justice system, re-entry programs are critical, especially those that support connection to work and education. Like many of the interventions needed on other challenges affecting Native youth specifically, culture is critical.

FOSTER CARE AND RECONNECTING NATIVE YOUTH WITH CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Foster care is another system that is all too present in the lives of Native youth across the country. Although the passage of ICWA was vital to turning the tide of Native youth being removed from their communities and families, many challenges still remain. In some states, Native youth are represented at two to three times the rate of other

populations in the foster care system. Over half the entire foster care population of Alaska and South Dakota are Native children.¹⁷ Nationally, Native children are 1.6 times more likely to be in the foster care system.

According to a recent analysis by the NCAI Policy Research Center, Alaska had the highest representation of Native youth in the foster care system at 50.4 percent.¹⁸ In an effort to address this, 18 tribes and tribal organizations recently signed

an historic agreement with the State of Alaska to create a first-of-its kind framework where responsibility for Indian child welfare cases is shared between the state and the individual tribes in Alaska.

Another very important step forward for Native children in this system came in December 2016 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs issued revised regulations and guidance about implementing ICWA with state and private agencies. This has provided tribes and advocates for Native children with an important new accountability tool in handling ICWA cases.¹⁹

As with every other system that involves Native youth, data is a critical challenge. In December 2016, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued new regulations governing which data elements would be included in the nation’s primary child welfare data system. As part of this new regulation, over 30 new ICWA-related data elements are required to be reported by state and private agencies, which will significantly support improved adjudication of ICWA cases. Unfortunately, the new administration recently announced that they are reexamining this regulation and tribal advocates are concerned that ACF may change the new data requirement for ICWA. The Acting Assistant Secretary of ACF recently held a consultation session on the matter with tribal leaders, but did not promise to protect

these provisions. The new administration must keep these provisions in place to support Native children in these systems.²⁰

In order to continue improving the situation for Native youth in the child welfare system, policymakers need to focus on the fact that Native people know what's best for their children. Improving the availability of data about Native children allows tribal leaders and program staff to better understand where their children are and what they need when it comes to handling their cases. New models, like the historic compact recently passed in Alaska, are paving the way to system reform that centers on community control. These approaches are crucial to achieve the ultimate goal of reuniting Native children with their families and communities.

CHANGING THE COURSE FOR SYSTEMS INVOLVING NATIVE YOUTH

Across the nation, new movements are developing and gaining attention for youth who are involved

in systems like juvenile justice, foster care, and others that play a role in removing children from their communities. While we have examined some of the ways that these individual systems are impacting Native youth today and historically, policy approaches to improve them must be holistic. Efforts to reduce the “school-to-prison pipeline” are a good example. While developing better research to understand the discipline disparities affecting Native youth is key, so too is understanding how they're being referred into other systems, as one example.

New models like the child welfare compact signed in Alaska, are based on previous successful efforts to improve other systems like the healthcare system. As those new efforts are implemented, we should learn from them to identify new holistic policy approaches that will support youth from cradle to career, and improve all the systems along the way that should be supporting them, not creating further barriers to their success.

SPOTLIGHT: A HISTORIC AGREEMENT IN ALASKA

In Alaska, Native youth represent just over 50 percent of the children in the foster care system, even though only about 20 percent of all children in Alaska are Native. At the opening of this fall's Alaska Federation of Natives meeting, state and tribal officials came together to sign a historic new compact that will give control over these systems back to tribal organizations and communities. Under the arrangement, tribes and tribal organizations will be allowed to take over responsibilities such as placing children in out-of-home care, licensing foster homes, and conducting child welfare case investigations, to name a few. This compact was modeled after a previous success in Alaska—the Alaska Tribal Health Compact, which significantly improved healthcare systems in Alaska after providing more control of services to tribal authorities. Moving forward, annual negotiations will take place to add new organizations to the compact and to make further decisions on funding.ⁱ

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Native youth attending the second annual Gen-I Native Youth Summer Networking Reception hosted by CNAY and the National Indian Gaming Association for interns working in the D.C. area.



CHAPTER THREE

EDUCATION AND JOBS

Aaron Slater

For Native American youth, attaining educational and career success can be hampered by institutional inequalities and a history of insufficient resources.

Although limited research has been conducted on the educational and professional success of Native youth, the data that does exist is astonishing. The 2016 graduation rate among AI/AN students was 70 percent compared to the national rate of 82 percent, and a rate of 87 percent for white students.¹ Additionally, in 2016 the median household income for Native American households was \$39,719 compared to the national median household income of \$57,617.² The economic well-being of a household has long-lasting effects on a child’s economic, educational, and health status—meaning that low household income can indicate continued adverse life course outcomes for Native American youth.³ The AI/AN community also has the highest unemployment rate of any race or ethnic group, with a 2016 unemployment rate of 12 percent, compared to the national average of 5.8 percent.⁴

Although Native youth have some of the lowest national graduation rates, it’s important to understand these statistics in a local context because of the diversity of tribal communities and cultures. For example, both Oklahoma and South Dakota have high densities of Native American students in their school systems, and yet each state has vastly differing graduation rates among AI/AN students. Oklahoma’s graduation rate for AI/AN students is 82 percent, compared to South Dakota’s AI/AN graduation rate of 47 percent.⁵ In the Southwest, the Navajo Preparatory School in Farmington, New Mexico had a graduation rate of 90 percent in 2011, well above both the New Mexico and Farmington averages.⁶ To better understand why schools serving AI/AN students are succeeding or failing, we need more research to be conducted, driven by tribes and tribal leadership. Without this research, many of our students will continue to suffer poor academic conditions and we will not be

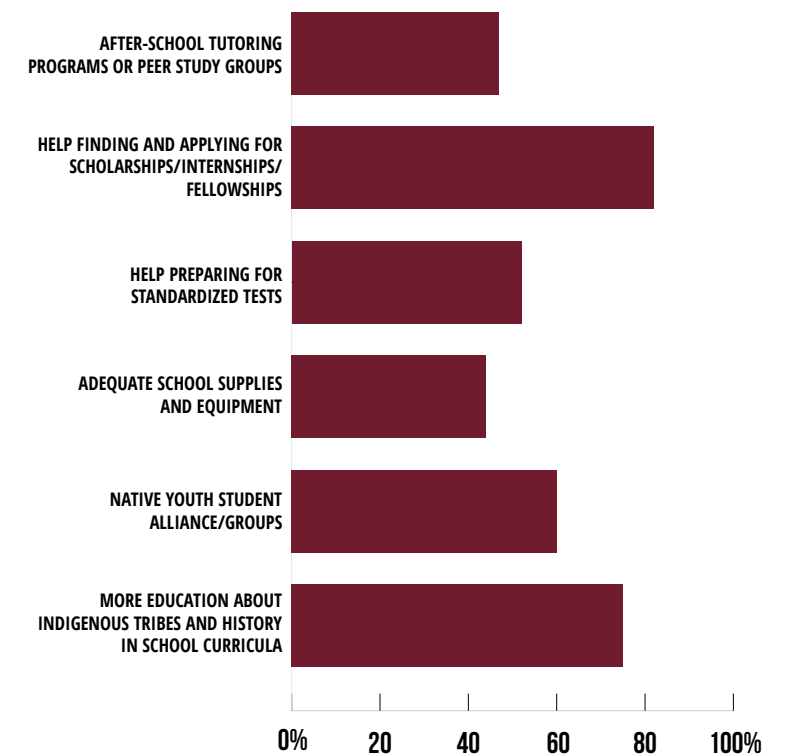
able to properly advocate, fund, and implement successful Native youth education programs.

Based on what we hear directly from Native youth, supported by academic research, the best way to promote Native youth well-being and educational success is through culture and community. In order to keep Native students in school and living healthy lives, we must emphasize the importance of tribal cultures in the classroom and the vital role of indigenous knowledge systems. Research indicates that connectedness to one’s tribal culture acts as a protective factor for Native youth, and promotes wellbeing both inside and outside of the classroom.⁷⁸

Furthermore, in 2014 the White House published a report on Native Youth that found, “incorporating

EDUCATION RESOURCES NEEDED

According to Native Youth, Ages 18-24



Source: Center for Native American Youth, “National 2017 Online Youth Survey Results.”

Native languages and culture into academic settings can improve educational engagement and outcomes...however, few schools adequately incorporate Native cultures into the curriculum.”⁹ We must take seriously the advice that elders have provided for generations, and fund cultural preservation efforts.

Though promoting Native values is at the core of improving educational outcomes for Native youth, what this looks like differs from tribe to tribe, and student to student. Native youth interact with their communities and cultures in a diversity of ways, and available programming should reflect that. The White House Report notes, “Native youth have a special role as citizens of tribal nations in defining the future of this country, and also in leading Native cultures, traditions, and governments into the next century.”¹⁰ In Alaska, Champion for Change Sam Schimmel connects with his culture and community through organizing traditional hunting and subsistence foraging trips. In the Southwest, Champion Sam Slater connects with his culture at Diné College by learning his language, silversmithing, and traditional moccasin making. Each Champion has taken skills taught to them by elders and developed community programming to help educate other Native youth from their regions. It is crucial that young minds like these have access to tribally-specific culture programs. In order to do so we need more research to implement best practices with these kinds of programs.

Another important opportunity to promote tribal culture and tribal control over education

“At my tribal college, the elders and medicine peoples’ knowledge is what fills our curricula and libraries, and that’s how we know our own worth as young Navajos”

SAM SLATER,
NAVAJO NATION
2016 CNAY CHAMPION FOR CHANGE

is through the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, passed by Congress in 2015. The ESSA creates vital mechanisms for further collaboration and coordination between state, tribal, and local education authorities.¹¹ Federal grants that were once unavailable or difficult to attain for tribal partners are now easier to access.¹² Additionally, the ESSA makes it easier for tribal elders to participate in the classroom as educators by lifting burdensome training requirements.¹³ Having elders in the classroom is a crucial victory that realigns the school environment within a more traditional approach to indigenous learning. Lastly, the ESSA has also created further funding for indigenous language immersion programming, a necessary step towards revitalizing our many languages and knowledge systems.¹⁴ Although the ESSA takes important steps in the right direction, this forward progress must be protected and improved upon through further funding and meaningful collaboration between state, tribal, and local education authorities.

IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE THROUGH IMPROVED CURRICULA

According to a 2015 study, only 13 percent of American curricula reference indigenous history, culture, or events occurring after the year 1900.¹⁵ This means a staggering 87 percent of schools do not reference the existence of modern Native peoples, nor do they acknowledge the modern successes and struggles of Native Americans. It should come as little surprise then, that Native youth often feel invisible and alienated by their teachers and peers while attending school.

It is not enough to educate Native youth alone about indigenous cultures. In order for our students to succeed academically, we need a nation well-educated in Native cultures—starting with our teachers. In 2015, the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education (WHIAIANE) conducted national listening sessions to gain a better understanding of the

state of Native education. One of their primary recommendations was for schools to “promote the accurate instruction of Native American history and culture to all school staffs and create initiatives for parents and tribal leaders to engage with students.”¹⁶ Too often, Native youth find themselves in the compromising position of feeling ostracized and demonized by their peers, teachers, and schools. One WHIAIANE respondent spoke of this all too familiar experience, saying, “Being Native at public school is really hard ... My teachers don’t understand me ... I feel like an outcast.”¹⁷ We must make our schools a safer environment for our Native youth, and this begins by educating our non-Native teachers and school staff.

Respondents in both our Gen-I survey and the WHIAIANE report indicated that a core approach to improving school climate for Native youth is through improved curricula about indigenous peoples.¹⁸ Improving school curricula pertaining to indigenous peoples can decrease tensions between Native youth and their peers and teachers,

“I believe that if tribes can create a strong economic system, they can then increase infrastructure particularly around education. I am and have always been a strong advocate for improving education systems in tribal communities.”

KEITH MARTINEZ,
OGLALA LAKOTA
2014 CNAY CHAMPION FOR CHANGE

creating a healthier environment more conducive to student success.¹⁹ Improving school climate by improving curricula and teacher training can have longstanding positive impacts on the educational achievement and well-being of Native youth.

In response to this need, Washington state passed a law mandating the implementation of the *Since Time Immemorial* social studies curriculum in 2015.²⁰ This curriculum was created in coordination



with all 29 federally recognized tribal nations within Washington state, including the Swinomish, Suquamish, and Quinault Nations. Currently, there are no other states with such a curricular mandate nor any state that has worked so closely with tribes in the development of their curriculum. The curriculum teaches Native culture, history, and governance while also emphasizing the importance of regional tribal differences.²¹ The curriculum requires local education authorities to coordinate and collaborate with tribal nations near their school districts in the development of their schools' curricula.

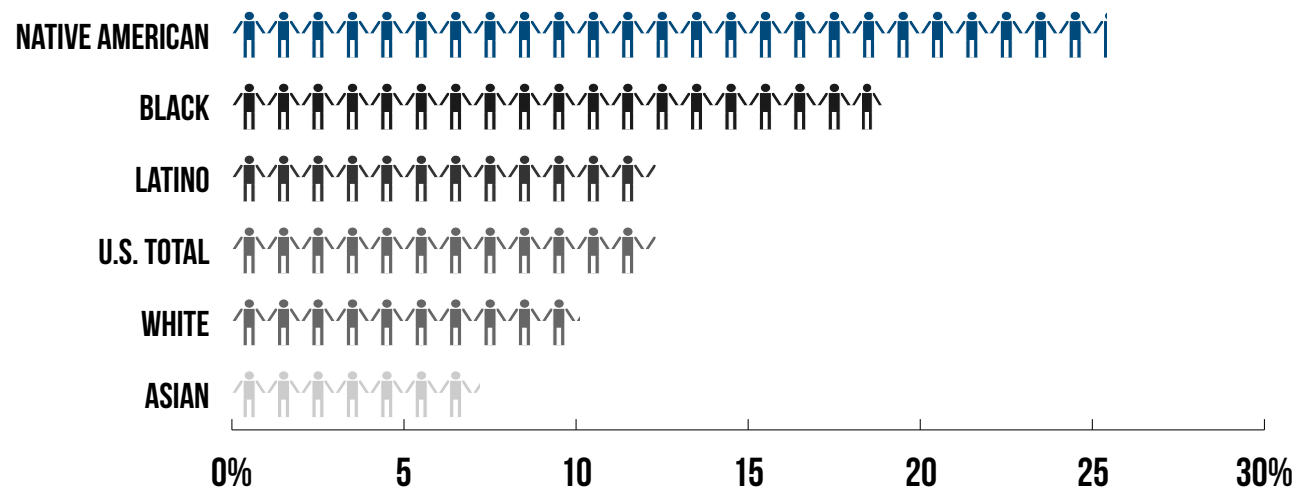
Legislation mandating the implementation of lesson plans such as the *Since Time Immemorial* curriculum is a necessary step in making schools a safe and positive place for Native students to learn. In recent years, Montana has revitalized efforts related to their *Indian Education for All Act*, a constitutional amendment outlining the importance of preserving Native cultures and histories through the educational system.²² Other states like Oregon, Idaho, and South Dakota have tried their hand at improving education pertaining

to Native peoples, however, none have gone so far as Washington.²³ In order for our students to succeed in the classroom, states must take it upon themselves to work with tribal nations to pass legislation mandating curricula that accurately represent Native peoples, past and present.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FOR NATIVE YOUTH

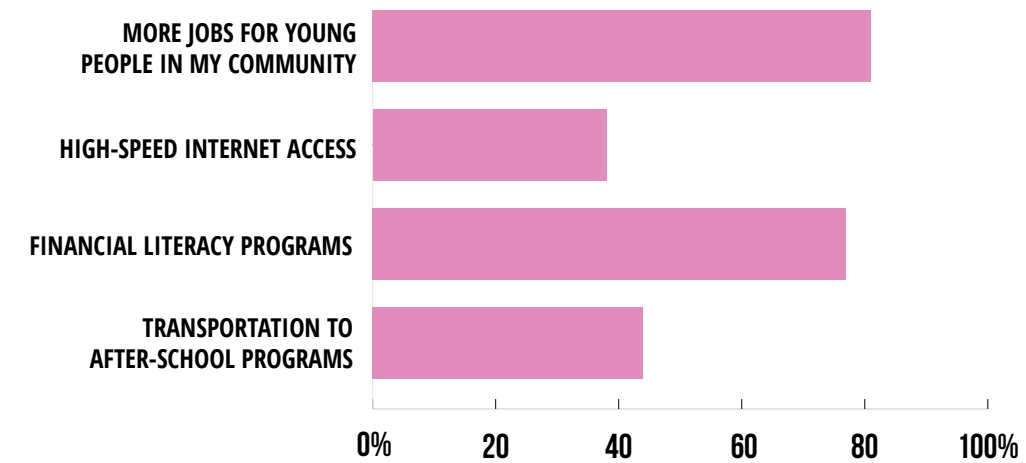
In recent years, greater national attention has focused on the issue of employing and educating opportunity youth. **Opportunity youth** are those individuals between the ages of 16 – 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor working.²⁴ According to a 2017 Measure of America study, opportunity youth grow up to experience, “lower incomes, higher unemployment rates, and negative physical and mental health outcomes.”²⁵ Additionally, opportunity youth are more at-risk of participating in the justice system, the juvenile justice system, and having unwanted or unplanned pregnancies.²⁶ Although this is an issue affecting youth, the

RATES OF OPPORTUNITY YOUTH By Race/Ethnicity



Source: Sarah Burds-Sharps and Kristen Lewis, "Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps," 2017, Brooklyn, New York: Measure of America. <https://static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/10%20by%20CD%20FINAL%202017.pdf>.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES NEEDED According to Native Youth, Ages 18-24



Source: Center for Native American Youth, "National 2017 Online Youth Survey Results."

residual problems faced by this population follow them throughout their lives and can have devastating impacts on their life outcomes.

Heartbreakingly, 25 percent of Native youth are opportunity youth.²⁷ This means that just over a quarter of Native American youth between the ages of 16 – 24 are neither working nor enrolled in school. The national rate of opportunity youth is 12.3 percent, over ten percent less than the rate for Native Americans. Although there has been a larger national dialogue on opportunity youth in the past decade, Native youth remain conspicuously absent. If we are to improve education and employment opportunities for Native youth, they must have a seat at the table in national discussions on engaging opportunity youth. Aside from national data, very little research has been done on the rates of AI/AN opportunity youth by congressional district, region, or tribe. Further research must be conducted within these crucial areas so policymakers, service providers, and tribes have a better understanding of the problems faced by Native youth.

This June, CNAY hosted a Policy and Resource Roundtable on employment opportunities for

Native youth. The event featured Director of Education of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Dr. Chris Meyer, who emphasized the importance of cradle-to-career pathways for student success. Dr. Meyer explained Coeur d'Alene's strategic plan to curb dropouts and youth unemployment through culturally-grounded summer intern programs and tribally-controlled partnerships with nearby colleges and certificate institutions. Coeur d'Alene strategically determines which careers

and jobs are of most need to their nation and provide incentives and career pathways for Native youth to grow into these positions. Cody Peone, a Coeur d'Alene youth involved in these programs for the past three years, was also a featured panelist. Cody explained, "[Native youth] need the chance to test the job waters and try new things, and we need programs with our culture. That's what really got me. Before it was just a job." The important mixture of education, culture, and career success was at the core of our roundtable's findings.²⁸

Programs like the Coeur d'Alene Education Pipeline provide Native youth with the incentives, support, and guidance needed to be successful professionals. Furthermore, these programs provide greatly-needed pathways and trainings for professions of need on reservations, helping to not only curb dropouts and unemployment, but also to further build tribal nations into thriving economies. State, federal, and tribal governments must strategically coordinate with one another to connect more youth with work and education in tribal communities, and help tribes develop cradle-to-career programming.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AROUND EDUCATION AND JOBS

CNAY has long-known that Native youth are at the forefront of strengthening their communities, and our country as a whole. With their passion, intellect, and dedication to community and culture, Native youth have paved the way for a better world for indigenous peoples and a more equitable country for us all. When provided the tools and support necessary for success Native youth are the stalwarts of tribal nation-building, caring for their peers and elders, and making way for a new generation of impactful Native youth. To continue uplifting this amazing work state, federal, and tribal governments must work with

service providers, businesses, and nonprofits to provide resources and programming necessary for improving Native American education and career success.

SPOTLIGHT: NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY

The Native American Community Academy (NACA) in Albuquerque, New Mexico is a diverse tuition-free charter school designed to promote college preparedness and Native American cultural values. NACA seeks to educate Native youth to be respectful of one another's identities and to be proud of their own. As part of their college preparation, NACA not only provides collegiate level courses but also focuses on the mental wellbeing of their students, ensuring that they are emotionally prepared for the next step in their educational journey. Students come from over 37 tribes and have the opportunity to study Native cultures, history, and language while attending the program. NACA is leading the way in Native education and continues to strategize with a variety of education professionals and tribal leaders on how best to educate Native youth.

For more information, visit www.nacaschool.org



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Gen-I Ambassador Trenton Casillas-Bakeberg, *Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe*, participating in Fresh Tracks, a training expedition that brings together participants from urban and indigenous communities for cross-cultural leadership experiences that tap into the power of the outdoors to unite and ignite.

For 18-year old Naelyn Pike, *San Carlos Apache*, protecting the land is a matter of protecting human rights. At age 15, she testified in front of Congress to call on the federal government to uphold its legal obligations to tribes and protect Oak Flat, a sacred site to the San Carlos Apache Tribe, from mining corporations¹. Over the past few years, Naelyn has become the spokesperson for Apache Stronghold, a grassroots organization working to protect all sacred land and indigenous peoples across the world from corporate entities.² Using Apache Stronghold, Naelyn has inspired and mobilized other Native youth and allies to protect sacred sites, lands, and waterways.

As the original inhabitants of the continent, indigenous peoples across the United States have a special relationship to the land we now call America. Many cultural ceremonies and traditions are inextricably tied to sacred sites, lands, and waterways. In other words, Native youth cannot effectively advocate for the endurance of their cultures without advocating for the protection of their lands, environment, and **sacred sites**. Across the country, Native youth have organized to act against climate change, build local capacity to create safe and clean community environments, protect sacred sites, and re-indigenize their traditional spaces.

THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

A recent report from the National Wildlife Federation found that climate change disproportionately affects Native communities who depend on the land for cultural and economic purposes.³ In Alaska, rising temperatures and melting permafrost have threatened the existence of indigenous villages like Newtok located near the state's western coast.⁴ In the event of a natural disaster, without contingency plans and support from the federal government to relocate communities like Newtok, residents have been forced to move and abandon both their communities and their traditional lands.⁵

"Attending the People's Climate March was a challenging and empowering experience. Chi-Nations Youth Council (CNYC) was able to organize a group of Chicago Natives to travel to Washington D.C. Co-President, Naomi Harvey-Turner, helped lead the march as myself and my brother, Adrien 'AJ' Pochel, volunteered as marshals. Through this trip I've learned that activating civic engagement starts with community."

ANTHONY TAMEZ,
SICANGU LAKOTA/FIRST NATION WUSKWI
SIPIHK CREE
GEN-I AMBASSADOR

As history has shown – and as recent studies have verified – forced relocation by any means is detrimental to a people's collective culture, thereby affecting individual and collective identities.⁶ While Newtok community members may have limited options for staying, supporting their relocation as a community is the best way to mitigate any loss of cultural identity.

The immediate effects of climate change can also be seen further south where rising temperatures have affected tribes' aquaculture and agriculture. In the Pacific Northwest, rising river temperatures have drastically decreased the cold-water fish populations, namely salmon, in the Columbia and Snake River Basins where over fifteen tribes, tribal confederations, and Canadian First Nations are situated.⁷ Although these waterways are protected under the Clean Water Act, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has failed to properly enforce the legislation, causing adverse cultural and economic effects for tribal communities dependent upon the rivers.⁸ In the Great Lakes area, unpredictable, extreme temperature changes have threatened wild rice paddies, a traditional staple food among tribes like the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.⁹

CHAPTER FOUR

SACRED SITES, LANDS, AND WATERWAYS

Bettina Gonzalez

Native youth have identified climate change as a priority, and nearly 70% of our online survey respondents want more efforts focused on climate change. Part of President Obama’s Generation Indigenous initiative to support Native youth was a call to action to Native youth to become Gen-I Ambassadors. Ambassadors like environmental activist Natasha Frazier, *Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe*, have been working to raise awareness about the threats of climate change to Native communities, and ways to support tribes. During the Spring of 2017, indigenous community leaders, including youth, were at the forefront of the Peoples Climate March in protest of the administration’s attitude towards climate change.¹⁰ Many Gen-I Ambassadors from across the country like Anthony Pochel Tamez, *Sicangu Lakota/First Nation Wuskwi sipihk Cree*, and Mani Wanji Zephier, *Yankton Sioux Nation*, organized their local youth councils to attend the Youth Convening kicking off the People’s Climate March. They also called on the federal government to support more progressive environmental policies.¹¹ Environmental groups like Earth Guardians, led by Native youth of Aztec descent, Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, are taking the U.S. Federal government to court to address the administration’s broader inaction on climate change.¹² 21 Native and non-Native youth plaintiffs between the ages of 10 and 21 filed a case in U.S. District Court, *Juliana v. U.S.*¹³ In the suit, they are arguing that the lack of federal action to mitigate climate change violates younger generations’ constitutional rights of life, liberty, and property, and breaches the public trust doctrine which holds the government accountable for preserving public lands and resources.¹⁴ While the case is still awaiting trial, this and other similar efforts demonstrate how Native youth are leading civic actions to protect our environment.

Gen-I Ambassador Naelyn Pike, *San Carlos Apache*, testifying in front of Congress regarding the protection of Oak Flat from mining corporations.

Photo Credit: The House Committee on Natural Resources.

EFFECTS OF PROPOSED BUDGET CUTS ON TRIBES AND THEIR ABILITY TO PROVIDE AND PROTECT SPACES

Over the summer, the House Appropriations Committee approved the fiscal year 2018 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill with a vote of 30–21.¹⁵ While agencies like the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) saw a \$10 million increase above the last year’s budget, there were significant cuts of about \$528 million to the EPA.¹⁶ This is especially significant for tribes as the EPA provides essential programs for land cleanup and spill prevention, such as their program in the Navajo Nation to clean up abandoned uranium mines.¹⁷ However, the lack of support from the federal government has not hindered local youth efforts to ensure safe and clean communities. Advocates like 18-year-old Adriano Tsinigine, Navajo Nation, are working on solutions for the safe closure of these uranium mines, as the youth member of the Diné Uranium



Remediation Advisory Commission, a position appointed by the Navajo Nation’s President.¹⁸

In other communities, Native youth are leading smaller yet impactful efforts to ensure that safe and healthy spaces are available for their relatives and other community members. For example, in Sitka, Alaska, Native youth from Pacific High School participated in a multi-year project in the community to clean up debris that washed up on the shores of Southeast Alaska following the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in 2013.¹⁹ Time and time again, Native youth in our roundtable discussions cite their own community cleanup efforts to address pollution and littering to provide healthy, clean, and safe spaces for their community. Nearly 65% of respondents to our online survey expressed a desire for more groups and programs aimed at promoting recycling in their communities.

“The environment is important to me because being outside and engaging with the outdoors allows me to reconnect with myself. When I’m back in Barrow, Alaska and I’m outside helping my brother and Dad, I feel connected with my culture on a spiritual level.”

**KIMBERLY PIKOK, IÑUPIAT,
FRESH TRACKS AMBASSADOR**

The cuts to agencies like EPA aren’t the only reason for concern. The Department of Interior, which oversees the management and conservation of most federal land and natural resources, will also face a \$1.6 billion cut in the 2018 fiscal year compared to this past year. Agencies like the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) will be impacted by cuts of up to 84%.²⁰ These cuts will have drastic negative repercussions for rural and Indian communities who depend on public lands for their livelihood. Interior’s budget for the

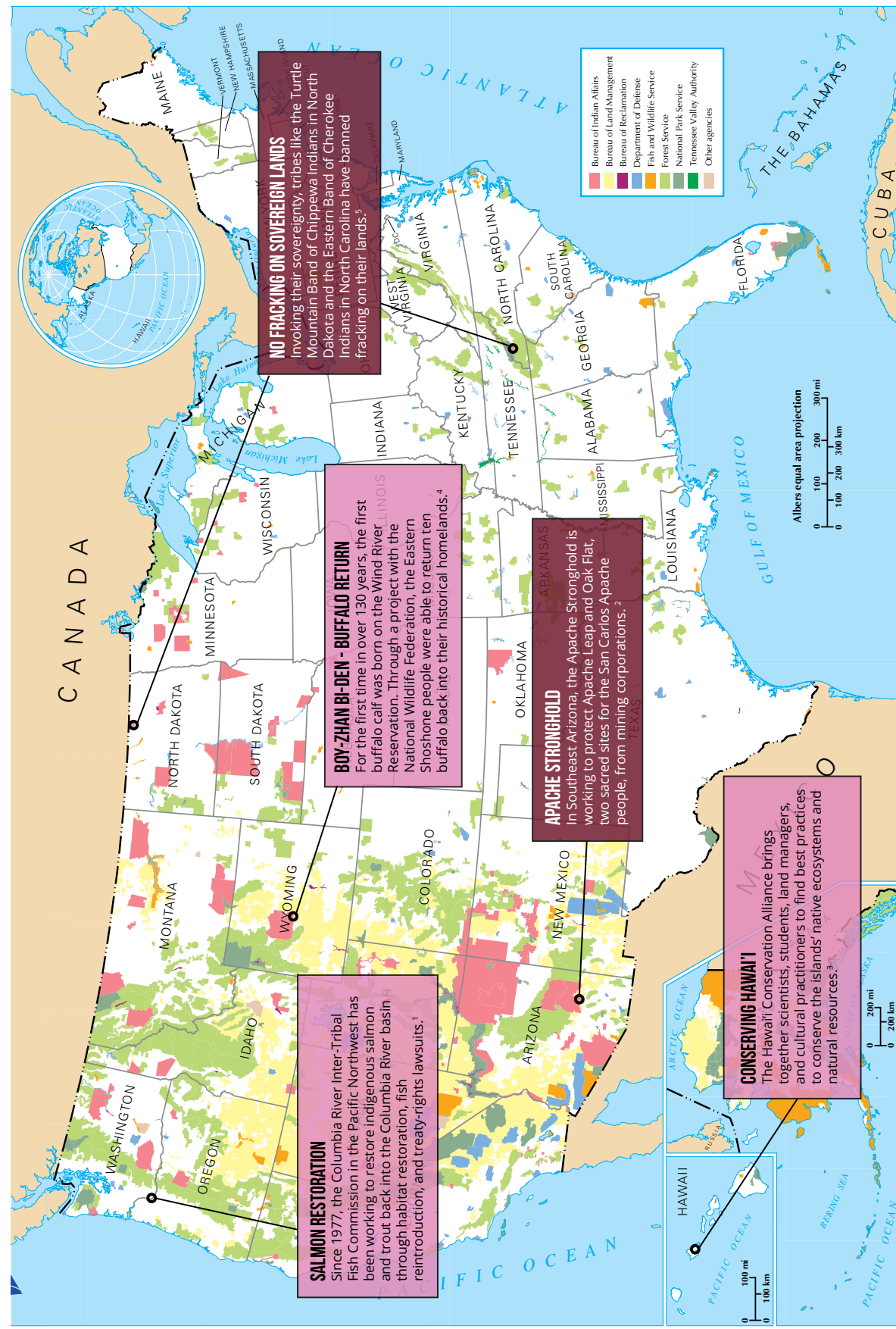
upcoming year will slash funding to rangeland management programs intended to help ranchers, wildlife management programs, and LWCF which protects national parks.²¹ Under the new budget, and Secretary Ryan Zinke’s leadership, the Department of Interior has refocused from a mission of conservation to one intended to boost the economy through mining, oil drilling, and other extractive industries in and around public lands.²² This shift is concerning as many public lands are near Indian reservations and are historical lands of tribal nations that contain sacred sites, and often fall under the federal government’s treaty obligations.²³

DEMANDING “REZPECT” AND OTHER EFFORTS TO PROTECT SACRED SITES, WATERWAYS, AND LANDS

Last year saw the largest and broadest demonstration of support for a tribe and their effort to protect their lands in the modern era. Started by a group of Native youth “Water Protectors,” the protest against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), which crosses the Missouri River near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, brought international attention to the need for a tribe’s protection of sacred sites and essential sources of clean water. The #NoDAPL movement convened a coalition of tribes, social justice activists, environmental activists, and allies. Despite the widespread support for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, construction of the pipeline continued after numerous court battles and the change of administration. Even after the final approval of the pipeline, indigenous communities organized the Native Nations March in Washington, D.C. – led by youth.

The protection of the waterways from DAPL in Standing Rock and Oak Flat from mining corporations in the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation are only two examples of efforts by Native youth to protect sacred sites from extractive

MOVEMENTS TO PROTECT & RESTORE LANDS, WATERWAYS, AND WILDLIFE



Tribal lands indicated in pink. Public lands are indicated in other colors according to the legend. Map source: www.nationalatlas.gov.

1 Jimmy Tobias, "The Native Tribe Is Reintroducing a Disappeared Species on Its Own Land," Pacific Standard, May 31, 2017, <https://psmag.com/magazine/native-tribe-reintroducing-disappeared-species-on-own-land>.
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industries and policies. In the Twin Cities, a group of Ojibwe teens paddled a total of 250 miles over three weeks from the Mississippi Headwaters to Big Sandy Lake. They were protesting a proposed oil pipeline going through Minnesota’s lakes that would threaten the clean water supply for tribes and low-income communities in the area.²⁴

Extractive industries are not the only threat to tribal land. In August of this year, Interior Secretary Zinke proposed dramatically reducing the size of four national monuments, including the Bears Ears National Monument in southeastern Utah.²⁵ A coalition of 30 tribes, advocacy groups like Utah Diné Bikéyah, the Native American Rights Fund, and an intergenerational group of Native Americans have spoken against the proposal and reaffirmed the cultural importance of protecting the Bears Ears monument.²⁶ Across the country, Native youth have expressed to us in roundtable discussions the need for more consultations from the federal government to protect tribal lands and resources as part of their trust obligation to tribes. Many of them have also expressed the need for more transparency about when consultations with their respective tribes take place, and the need for stronger youth involvement in the process.

"It's important to include Native youth in consultation conversations regarding land protection because Native youth are the ones who will have to continue these consultations. Allowing Native youth the opportunity to get involved in consultations now will guarantee the importance and practice long after our generation steps into government roles."

**NANCY DEERE-TURNEY,
MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION,
2017 CNAY CHAMPION FOR CHANGE**

RE-INDIGENIZING THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE

While protecting the lands is a critical priority, so is the need to strengthen the indigenous qualities of those lands. Tribes across the country have supported initiatives to reintroduce wildlife back into their lands. According to tribal members in the Colville community where these efforts are underway, wildlife restoration is a “direct expression of their self-determination and sovereignty,” as it is an exercise of their prerogative to manage their own lands without the interference of state or federal wildlife and land management authorities.²⁷ In the Pacific Northwest, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation is reintroducing the pronghorn antelope back to its original habitat²⁸; in Montana, the Blackfeet Nation is bringing bison back to their historic range²⁹; and in Northern California, the Winnemem Wintu Tribe has worked diligently to repatriate salmon back to their original homes from New Zealand where they had been imported in the early twentieth century.³⁰ Youth have also been involved in wildlife reintroduction efforts. The Winnemem Wintu Tribe is making an explicit effort to involve youth in the restoration of their traditional salmon by bringing their youth to New Zealand to help with the tribe’s research effort.³¹ Youth involvement in the movement to re-indigenize spaces through restoration and conservation is especially important as it serves to not only educate younger generations about traditional ecosystems, but also reaffirms the political and legal concept of tribal sovereignty through land and resource management.³²

Beyond the work being done by tribal governments, Native youth also have established local initiatives in their communities to revitalize indigenous plants and horticulture through efforts like community gardens and seed restoration. Azelya Yazzie, Navajo and Blackfeet Nations, a Native youth from Southern California, received a grant from the Pollination Project to fund a community garden for Native youth. The project is designed to teach fellow Native youth how to grow traditional

crops and use them to make traditional meals.³³ In New Mexico, Joylynn Garcia, *Pueblo de Cochiti*, is passionate about ecology and wildlife biology, and is working to restore indigenous seeds to her community after a wildfire devastated trees in the area. For these youth and many others, restoring the land back to its indigenous roots is a way to strengthen their tribes' cultures and autonomy.

INDIGENOUS IDENTITY AND LANDS

For Native people, land is an integral part of one's identity. Last year, our report focused on the strength that youth draw from their culture and one of the most important ways Native youth across the country are doing so is through the

protection of sacred sites and lands. Protecting sacred sites remains a top priority for Native youth across the country with nearly 75% of our online survey respondents wanting more efforts and resources for the protection of these places. Sacred sites connect youth to their elders and ancestors. The lands have fed generations and nourished them with water. Whether it's a prayer camp at the site of an intended pipeline, building capacity to educate and sustain local communities, or a march in Washington, D.C., Native youth are driven to civic action because of their culture and its relationship with the land.

SPOTLIGHT: DINÉ-PUEBLO YOUTH SOLIDARITY COALITION

The mission of Diné-Pueblo Youth Solidarity Coalition is to establish that youth in Navajo and Pueblo tribal communities stand united in protecting the longevity of natural and cultural resources in the Greater Chaco landscape. The group organizes to provide education on the extreme detrimental cultural, public health, natural resource, and economic impacts of fracking on indigenous lands, bodies, and communities. The Diné-Pueblo Youth Solidarity Coalition does this by highlighting the work of Navajo and Pueblo communities in the struggle, uplifting the voices of youth, and advocating that all must look to traditions and future generations for solutions to determine present actions. Their efforts are rooted in utilizing various positions within environmental justice and community work as platforms from which to share vital knowledge and empowerment with Pueblo and Diné communities.



Photos Courtesy of Kayleigh Warren, *Santa Clara Pueblo/Isleta Pueblo*, Founding Member

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APPENDIX

Glossary

About the Gen-I Survey

About the Cover Art

About Us



GLOSSARY

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

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

Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) is a cross-sector initiative launched by President Obama in 2014 to focus on strengthening resources for Native youth and building new platforms where they can share their voice, recognize one another, and inspire positive change. As part of the initiative, CNAY manages the National Native Youth Network of Gen-I.³

For more information about the Gen-I Network, visit www.cnay.org.

Indian Country legally refers to “(a) all land within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States Government, notwithstanding the issuance of any patent, and, including rights-of-way running through the reservation, (b) all dependent Indian communities within the borders of the United States whether within the original or subsequently acquired territory thereof, and whether within or without the limits of a state, and (c) all Indian allotments, the Indian titles to which have not been extinguished, including rights-of-way running through the same.”⁴

Indian Reservation “is an area of land reserved for a tribe or tribes under treaty or other agreement with the United States, executive order, or federal statute or administrative action as permanent

tribal homelands, and where the federal government holds title to the land in trust on behalf of the tribe.”⁵

Native American refers to “all Native peoples of the United States and its trust territories” — this includes American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Chamorros, American Samoans, and U.S. residents from Canada First Nations and indigenous communities in Central and South America. For the purposes of CNAY, Native American refers to any self-identifying individual of indigenous ancestry in the Americas.⁶

Opportunity Youth are those individuals between the ages of 16 – 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor working.⁷

Public Lands refers to “any land and interest in land owned by the United States” except for lands located on the Outer Continental Shelf and those lands held for the benefit of American Indians and Alaska Natives.⁸

Sacred Site refers to “any specific, discrete, narrowly delineated location on Federal land that is identified by an Indian tribe, or Indian individual determined to be an appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion, as sacred by virtue of its established religious significance to, or ceremonial use by, an Indian religion; provided that the tribe or appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion has informed the agency of the existence of such a site.”⁹

Tribe, otherwise called a “federally recognized (Indian) Tribe”, refers to any American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entity with a government-to-government relationship with the U.S. that is entitled to federal trust obligations. There are currently 567 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Each tribe is distinct, with its own culture, traditions, language, and community. CNAY, however, also represents state-recognized tribes, and tribes not recognized by state or federal

governments. When using the word tribe in our work, we are referring to all tribes in the United States unless specifically outlined as a federally-recognized tribe.¹⁰

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

Tribal Consultation “is a process that aims to create effective collaboration with Indian tribes and to inform Federal decision-makers. Consultation is built upon government-to-government exchange of information and promotes enhanced communication that emphasizes trust, respect, and shared responsibility.”¹¹

Trust Obligation refers to the federal government’s responsibility “to protect tribal treaty rights, lands, assets, and resources, as well as a duty to

carry out the mandates of federal law with respect to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.”¹²

Turtle Island refers to North America according to certain indigenous creation stories.¹³

Two-Spirit is a contemporary term primarily used as an organizing strategy for people who identify as both Indigenous to the area now known as North America, and somewhere along the sexual orientation and/or gender identity spectrum(s). This includes Native American lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) individuals. Two-Spirit identities are tribe and culture-specific, meaning that roles vary according to each tribal nation’s historical and cultural understandings of sexuality and gender-diverse persons.¹⁴

Youth refers to people under the age of 25 years.

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CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH
AT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



ABOUT THE GEN-I SURVEY

Each year, CNAY hosts meetings and roundtables with Native youth and service providers in tribal communities across the country to listen to their current challenges, learn about programs that are making a difference, and to better understand the priorities that matter to Native youth. This is one of the most important ways we ensure that Native youth drive our work. We have conducted over 180 roundtables in 25 states with youth representing over 260 tribes.

In an effort to hear from even more youth, we launched our second annual Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) Online Roundtable Survey. Building from our roundtable model, this survey asked Native youth across the country between the ages of 18 – 24 about what kinds of resources they need and the priorities they care about. Eventually, we also hope to be able to survey younger stakeholders.

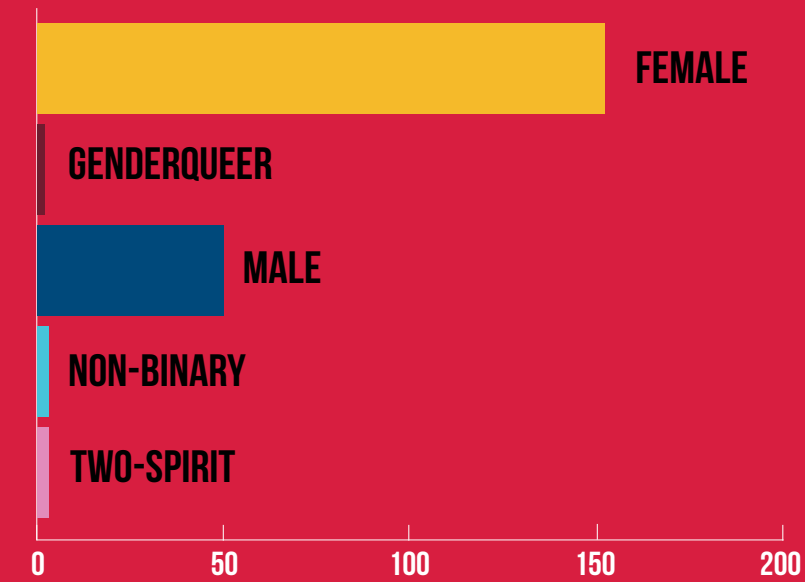
Survey participants were also encouraged to get further involved with Gen-I. As part of the Gen-Initiative launched by President Obama, CNAY

manages the National Native Youth Network to provide a sustainable platform to connect, engage, and develop opportunities for Native youth. Native youth are encouraged to take the Gen-I Challenge and to become Gen-I Ambassadors. Ambassadors are Native youth leaders willing to share their perspectives on Native youth priorities—like culture and language revitalization, sacred lands, health and wellness—through writing op-eds, attending community gatherings, and representing a youth perspective at meetings with the Administration, members of Congress and other important decision-makers. Ambassadors also help share information about resources with their peers, and serve as spokespersons for their communities, Gen-I, and CNAY.

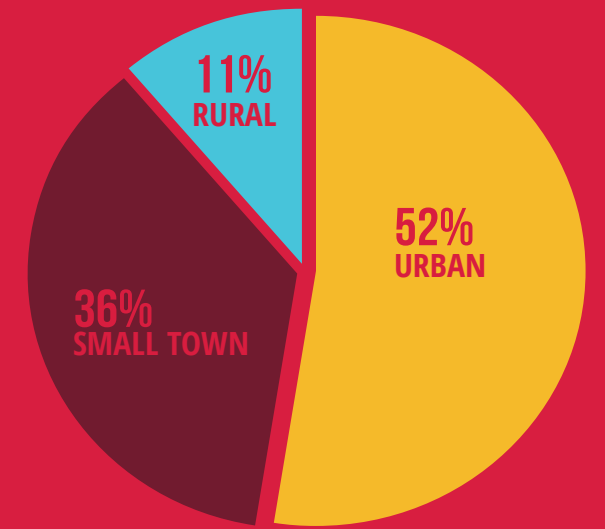
This year we received over **204** responses from Native youth, across the country. On the next page is a summary of our survey findings:

GENDER IDENTIFICATION

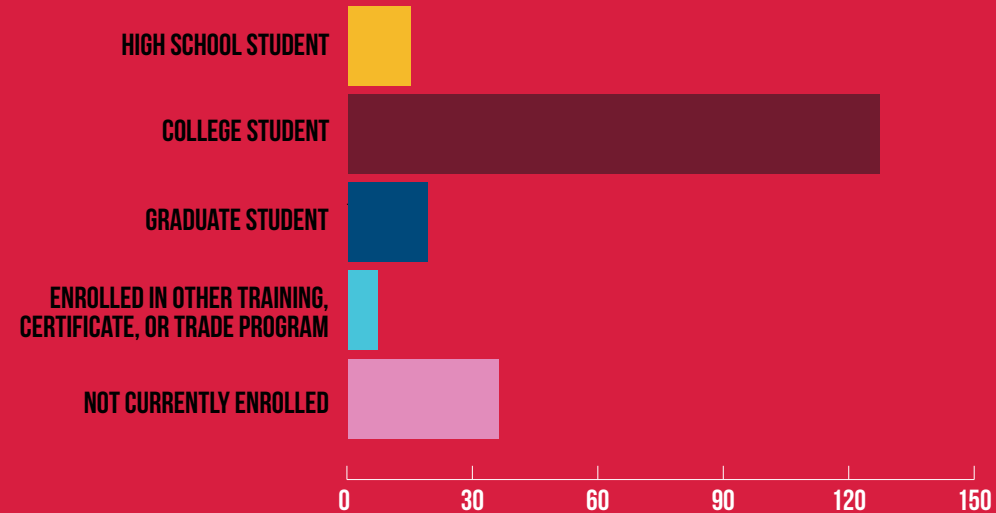
*Participants may select all that apply



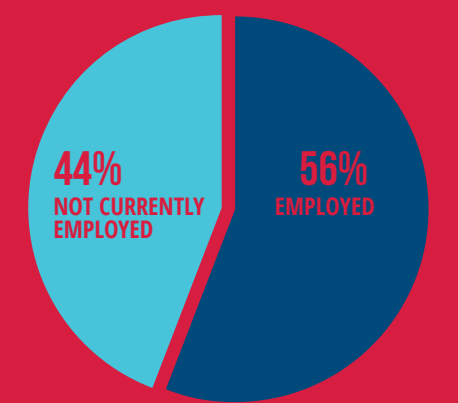
CURRENT HOME LOCATION



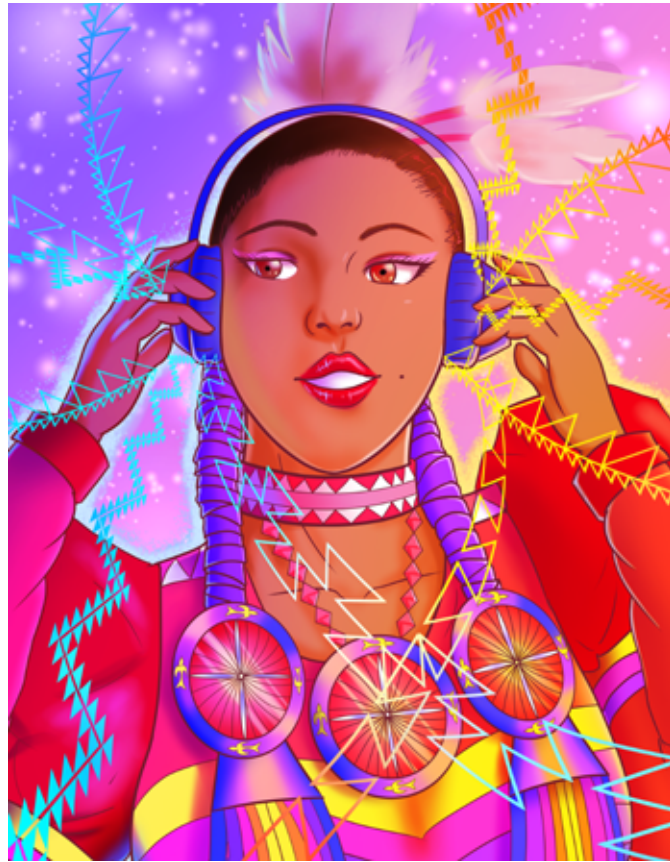
CURRENT ACADEMIC STATUS



EMPLOYMENT STATUS



ABOUT THE COVER ART



by Lena Wright, Yurok Tribe

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Lena grew up on the Pyramid Lake Paiute reservation in Nevada, but is affiliated with the Yurok Tribe in California. Her work aims to move past what main stream society would consider to be “Native American” (mascots, headdresses, mysticism, etc.) and work against those stereotypes to combat issues that are prevalent in her community. In doing so, a part of her work celebrates the positives of indigenous cultures, such as dance, celebration, and music. It also highlights the difficulties with being Native and the necessity of social movement.

ABOUT THE ART

“In this generation it’s hard to be Native. It’s harder to be taught things like language, stories, and customs with past links being lost. In this piece, for example, I can only represent what I’ve been taught and what I know: dance, basketry, music. Being able to create ideas from an unrecorded past is difficult, but necessary. My classmates have created language apps, wrote reports on historic trauma, and publicly spoke about violence against native women. Being native in this generation is about reviving lost culture, keeping it within our hearts, and moving past negativity towards something positive.”

ABOUT US

THE CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH

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

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

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

**STATE OF
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