

# Respect is a Tribal tradition: Change Team supports LGBTQ/Two-Spirits

Before colonization and throughout many Tribal communities and histories, there was a deep understanding and affirmation of broad and mixed gender roles. People were not just born men or women, masculine or feminine; we all had a mix of both traits within ourselves.

*"Our Elders tell us of people who were gifted among all beings because they carried two spirits, that of male and female. It is told that women engaged in tribal warfare and married other women, as there were men who married other men. These individuals were looked upon as a third and fourth gender in many cases and in almost all cultures they were honored and revered. Two-spirit people were often the visionaries, the healers, the medicine people, the nannies of orphans, the care givers." Sandra Laframboise and Michael Anhorn<sup>1</sup>*

After colonization, there has been little recognition of this history and often our Two-Spirit Tribal members feel isolated and invisible in both their Tribal community as well as the larger world.

In 2010, with the support of the Western States Center, the Siletz Tribal Change Team was created to improve the services utilized by the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) and Two-Spirit community.

Mindful that we have not as a community or Tribal government made explicit efforts to reach out and serve our LGBTQ/Two-Spirit community members, the team committed to create awareness, provide education/resources and change the culture of the Native community to be more accepting of LGBTQ/Two-Spirit individuals.

In an effort to promote the National Coming Out Day event as well as elevate the lives, voices, experiences and leadership of LGBTQ/Two-Spirit Tribal citizens, the Change Team will profile Tribal community members who are proudly LGBTQ/Two-Spirit leaders. This month, the Change Team profiles Sequoia Breck, a TYEE worker in the Portland Area Office.

**What's it like being Two-Spirit in Siletz?** Not much different than being straight in Portland because it's not anyone's concern what your sexual orientation is. People are more open here than in a smaller town because they've seen more.

**How were you raised in your family to understand who you are and what identities you claim?** Growing up, my mom would always tell me, "If you like girls, it's okay; if you like boys, it's okay." She didn't assume anything, so me telling her didn't shock her. As for my other family, they support me so they just accepted me automatically.

**How have you been able to share this identity with other folks in your family and community?** With family, I just told them and they accepted it. With the community, I don't bring it up unless it needs to be. I don't think it's something that you have to tell everybody. The only people it really needs to be told to are the folks you might date.

**What would make you feel welcome and affirmed within your own community?** I already feel welcomed in my community. I never felt unwelcome because I surround myself with open, intelligent people, some of whom are also LGBTQ. They don't try and tell you who to be, they just accept you at value.

**How has gender identity shaped your role in the community and the way you have grown your influence and leadership?** Going to places like NARA for the Two-Spirit youth group has made me feel more confident and more of a leader because I can tell people about places they can go and feel welcome and get assistance for what they need.

**What factored into your decision to come out to your family or community?** I wanted to tell people so they knew me and my personality better.

**If the Tribe were to become truly welcoming and affirming, what would that look like to you?** Having a youth/young adult trip that is just for Two-Spirit/LGBTQ individuals so they can relate and feel comfortable coming out, so they know that being LGBTQ or Two-Spirit isn't something abnormal in our Tribe.



**Why are support groups for Two-Spirit folks in the Siletz Tribe an important response and effort to build gender justice within the Tribe?** It tells the Tribal members that we as a Tribe accept this and it's not a bad thing. This is especially needed in Siletz, as there aren't as many services there for Two-Spirit or gay people to feel welcomed and part of the community.

**How do you understand how LGBTQ and Two-Spirit issues are seen or thought of within your Tribe?** I don't really know because it isn't something that's widely discussed. But I feel that most of our members are neutral; they are smart enough to think of people as people and not label them.

**While working at the PAO as a TYEE worker and being Two-Spirit, how did you feel?** Working at the PAO, I felt like my sexuality was a non-issue. I'm a person doing my job, not just a pansexual doing my job.

I'd like to add that if you're gay, it's not the only thing you are. Don't make yourself all about being gay. You are more than who you fall in love with. Don't shove it in people's faces, it's unnecessary.

Note: A pansexual is someone who likes all genders. They like people based on their personalities, not their parts.

If you would like to be profiled and included in the Change Team's efforts, please contact Jamie Bokuro or Tracey Worman at 800-922-1399 or 541-444-2532.

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved July 19, 2010, from [dancingtoeagle-spiritsociety.org/twospirit.php](http://dancingtoeagle-spiritsociety.org/twospirit.php)

## Upcoming Events Siletz

Celebration of National Coming Out Day – Oct. 11  
12:30-2:30 p.m. at the Siletz Tribal Community Center. Barbecue-style lunch and refreshments; speakers on the Tribe's history with LGBTQ/Two-Spirit individuals, what it means to identify as LGBTQ/Two-Spirit and the struggles in today's society, the mission of the Change Team and a closing blessing/song. Also will preview a film by Basic Rights Oregon. Tribal programs will attend with information on what they provide.

Support Group Meeting – Oct. 16  
5:30-6:30 p.m. (potluck, bring your favorite dish)

## Salem

Support Group Meeting – Oct. 10  
5 p.m. (potluck, bring your favorite dish)

## Portland

Support Group Meeting –  
October date TBA  
5:30 p.m. (potluck, bring your favorite dish)

## Eugene

Support Group Meeting –  
October date TBA  
5 p.m. (potluck, bring your favorite dish)

Contact the area offices if you would like to participate in our upcoming events or would like more information about the Change Team. You also can find valuable information on our Facebook page. Just search "Siletz LGBTQ Equality" and click "Like."

## Enrollment Committee

Current Vacancy – Term Ending February 2013

Application deadline for consideration to fill the vacant committee position is Oct. 17, 2012

Any Tribal member interested in serving on the Enrollment Committee must fill out the following form and return it to the address below prior to close of business on Oct. 17, 2012.

Please mail or fax your application to Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Attn: Executive Secretary to Tribal Council, P.O. Box 549, Siletz, OR 97380-0549; fax: 541-444-8325.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Roll No: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: Day ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Evening ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Appointment to the committee will be made at the Regular Tribal Council meeting in October.



Photo by Diane Rodriguez

In the August issue of Siletz News, Yvonne Opperud was misidentified in this photo with Rollie Rilatos from the Nesika Illahee Pow-Wow. Siletz News regrets the error.