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INSIDE

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‘That’s our community talking to us’

CDC: Nearly half of all Native American women have suffered physical or sexual violence

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

MISSION — The survivors, advocates and community members sat around tables in a large room at Wildhorse Resort & Casino on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

On the walls around them were the words of people who, through a year-and-a-half-long project, shared their messages and stories about domestic and sexual violence on tribal land. One message read:

“Maybe with more awareness for victims they will find the inner spirit to report and stand against their families to protect against the next victim of this. But it will take culture change as it is generational and has had the blind of eye of change for so very very long.”

A group of at least 30 people gathered at the casino on a rainy Friday, Nov. 19, to hear the results of the project from Family Violence Services, a tribal public safety program dedicated to helping survivors of violence on the reservation.

“It took listening to you, our people in the community, to pull this together,” said Desiree Coyote, an abuse survivor, advocate and enrolled tribal member who manages Family Violence Services.

Survey prompts response from community

The survey involved 86 community members and 70 people who work for tribal entities. The results showed that survivors of sexual violence on the reservation don’t trust authorities, fear retaliation if they talk and fear friends and family won’t believe them or would shame them.

“It makes it an even more painful process if you can’t turn to those who are closest to you,” said Dr. Diane Gout, an evaluator from Maine who, along with Coyote, spearheaded the project.

More than half of respondents, most of whom are women, said they are “very aware” of sexual violence occurring in their community, and more than a third said the violence has become worse over time, the survey data showed.

From 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., speakers talked about the survey results and the long history of abuse and violence on the reservation. Community members and survivors spoke about solutions they’d like to see and how they want their voices heard. Some shared their own experiences with the people around them.

See Violence, Page A9

It takes a village



School district uses partnerships to help students weather pandemic

Kamron Drury couch surfed for most of 2020 after leaving an unstable home life. He struggled to focus at school, battled anxiety and was at risk of not graduating. With the help of Morrow County School District’s wraparound program, his grades improved, he feels healthier, lives in his own apartment and he likely will graduate in the spring of 2022.

Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

MORROW COUNTY — It takes a village to raise a child. If the Morrow County School District had a mantra, it might be this old African proverb.

Because of a wraparound program that already was in place, the district nimbly moved to support students as they switched from in-person school to remote learning and back again, addressing pandemic-related damage done to students’ mental well-being and learning levels.

Take the case of Heppner High School senior Kamron Drury.

The 18-year-old admitted he might



Dirksen



Doherty



George

have fallen through the cracks without the district’s assistance. He left home a couple of years ago to escape a whirlwind of family dysfunction that brought him stress and panic attacks. Drury couch surfed most nights, packing his possessions from place to place. He worried about graduating.

“During my sophomore year, there was COVID and a lot of other stressors in my life,” he said. “I fell very, very behind. Junior

year wasn’t as productive as it could have been.”

With support from the program, Drury improved his grades and moved into his own apartment in September. He secured two jobs, cooking at a restaurant and cleaning rooms at a hotel, and ran cross-country this fall. To combat anxiety, Drury meets with in-school counselor Amy George, who is employed by Community Counseling Solutions, about once a week. Care Coordinator Peggy Doherty helped Drury obtain documents such as an Oregon ID, birth certificate and Social Security card.

Team efforts and tech pay off

Superintendent Dirk Dirksen said the

See Village, Page A9

A safe place

Martha’s House provides home to help people improve their lives

By **ERICK PETERSON**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — A transitional family shelter in Hermiston opened its doors this past weekend to introduce itself to neighbors, to potential new residents and to prospective volunteers.

Martha’s House, a ministry of Eastern Oregon Mission, held an open house Saturday, Nov. 20. The facility at 305 S.E. Fourth St. offers a place for home-

less families to live for three to six months while they get back on their feet.

As volunteers met with visitors during the open house, they spoke of this community resource and expressed excitement over its mission.

Julia Galan, house manager, gave the first tour of the day. She walked visitors past the house’s 18 studios, kitchen and other

See Safe place, Page A9



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

House manager Julia Galan, right, offers a tour of a freshly furnished suite Saturday, Nov. 20, 2021, at Martha’s House in Hermiston. The suite, which can house up to four people is one of 18 at the family shelter.

