

World AIDS Day encourages awareness, prevention

By Brian Mortensen
Spilyay Tymoo



Brian Mortensen/Spilyay

Toni Made, left, listens to a question from Aaron Heath during an icebreaker exercise at the Warm Springs World AIDS Day activities at the Warm Springs Community Center Dec. 1. Heath is a member of the Teens Risk Reduction Education for Native School-age Youth group.

Even with the lowest nationwide number of patients having the AIDS virus, the Native American community could be at risk, said a guest speaker in Warm Springs. The comments came during World AIDS Day activities, Dec. 1, at the Community Wellness Center.

Irene Vernon, Director of the Center for Applied Studies of American Ethnicity and a co-project director of the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, said in a lecture at the Warm Springs Community Center that AIDS, once thought of as only a plague of homosexual men has become a disease that now affects mostly women in impoverished communities of ethnic minorities.

"Right now, the majority of those affected are members of the African-American and Latino population, with Native Americans and Pacific Islanders carrying a very small population, less than one percent," she said. "But the risk factors that we have are very similar to other communities of color."

A cautionary tale

The AIDS virus is the No. 1 killer of African-American women ages 25 to 44, she said.

"We have many of those risk factors in our communities," said Vernon, who is of Mescalino-Apache, Yaqui Indian and Mexicana descent. "Different risk factors, different communities, but sometimes some of the risk factors, we find all of the Native community."

When she has spoken on the AIDS epidemic before Native audiences, Vernon has delivered what she calls a "cautionary tale" of the risk factors and what could happen without education about the epidemic and how to prevent it.

"AIDS could wipe out a small Native community," she said. "For example, there are villages in Alaska that have only 100 people in them, with cases of full-blown AIDS within those communities," like

The risk factors, she said, are biological, such as the high rate of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) within the Native community, economic, cultural and social.

Women are in more danger than men, she said, because the HIV virus is more concentrated in semen than in vaginal secretions, and thus, can be more easily transferred from men to women.

"I really believe poverty is really driving the pandemic," Vernon said. "That's why it's

"I really think it's not an insurmountable disease."

Irene Vernon

flourishing in Third World countries and impoverished communities.

"If you don't have money, you don't have access to health care, you don't have access to education, you're hindered from certain medications. You're also usually in poor health if you live in an impoverished community."

Drugs, the biggest problem

Discrimination, as well as mistrust of government care, keeps members of the Native community from information and medical help, as well.

The biggest problem, however, is substance abuse, she said. "It doesn't give you HIV/AIDS, but it certainly takes away your inhibitions," she said.

Vernon said she encourages tribal members wherever she

speaks on the topic to assess the risky elements within their own communities.

"Each community will be different," she said. "Some have really high STD rates. Some have large meth(amphetamine) problems. You really need to see where your community is and then go from there.

"You really have to figure out what's in your community, what kind of level of understanding, and what kind of issues and problems you have. Do you have a larger youth population than you do an older population? Do you have a community that has a lot of meth, compared to just a lot of pot smoking or a lot of alcohol (abuse), so you have to really assess where you are to sort of address the problem."

Another facet to the specter of AIDS is the problem of domestic violence.

"The way that domestic violence works for women generally is their men isolate them," she said. "They live on the outskirts. They don't like (the women) to have phones. They kind of prohibit them from getting jobs.

"They're too scared, particularly if they're not married, to wear condoms."

And women in violent situations may not leave an abusive partner because they fear they, and their children, are not able to live without him.

"And there have been some cases where rape was a transmission of HIV," she said.

Vernon said young girls that date older men are also at risk because of the man's prior

sexual experience.

Vernon said her aim was to offer support as well as clear up misconceptions about HIV and AIDS.

"I think communities need to gather around and really access their communities and talk to one another about what's available, what we can do for each other," she said. "I really think it's not an insurmountable disease.

Education is key

"We have so many problems in Indian country, and HIV is another one along with cancer and diabetes and (tuberculosis) and substance abuse, so we really need to think holistically of how do we treat the whole person and how can we come together to address it together."

"It's just awareness," said Donell Frank after having been involved in an "icebreaker" exercise conducted by the Teens Risk Reduction Education for Native School-age Youth group. "I think it's good to know, to educate yourself, not only yourself, but whoever's interested in it, so they can protect themselves

and others who have it or are carrying it in a healthier way instead of a negative way. I think a lot of us know how to deal with the negative, and I think we need to learn how to deal with it positively by supporting those who have it or don't know they have it or those that don't have an understanding of it."

Angela Sampson has three children, ages nine, 10, and 11, and she said she wants to be able to tell them about the disease.

She said that as old as each of her children are, they are old enough to have candid conversations about such things as AIDS.

"I wanted to learn something so I could tell my kids about it," she said. "They're just getting to the age they ought to know about it."

Vernon had delivered a similar message to a campus of First Nations University of Canada (formerly Saskatoon Indian Federated College) in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, last spring, and in Oklahoma recently.

With the Tri-Ethnic Center, Vernon has spoken all over the U.S.

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Hatchery to have new visitor center

By Nat Shaw
For Spilyay Tymoo

Plans are moving forward for a new visitor center at the Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery. A 13-member group working on the project held its first meeting last month.

The Visitor Center idea was conceived as the fish hatchery held its 25th anniversary a little more than a year ago. The idea was first considered during preparation for the Silver Anniversary.

Amy Gaskill, fisheries outreach and public relations specialist for the Pacific Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has provided the momentum for the project. Gaskill put the team together with specific emphasis on targeted areas.

The interpretive panels currently in the lobby of the fish hatchery contain information available at the time the hatchery was constructed in 1978. A new design proposal, which provides for the use of existing structures to represent information based on the latest research and hatchery practices, is being developed.

The proposal also offers a partnership with local artists, allowing the opportunity to prove an accurate depiction of the cultural significance of salmon.

Apolonia Santos, curator at Kah-Nee-Ta Resort, is a member of the workgroup representing traditional artists.

The first workgroup meeting

opened with a presentation by the One Plus Two design team from Portland. The firm has been hired to assist in transforming the fish hatchery lobby into a visitor center.

The design team made a far-reaching presentation that included a site plan, floor plan, entry signage, exhibit floor plan, exhibit ideas, and rail graphics.

Gaskill explained that Bend is one of the fastest growing cities in Oregon, such that, by 2000, the traffic on U.S. Highway 26 had increased to an average of 4,100 vehicles per day.

The Oregon Department of Transportation expects traffic to increase significantly along the corridor as growth continues in Central Oregon. Gaskill said the growth will help the fish hatchery, the Museum at Warm Springs and Kah-Nee-Ta High Desert Resort and Casino be successful.

Carol Leone, the executive director of the Museum at Warm Springs, and Rudy Clements, the Chairman of the Board of Directors at Kah-Nee-Ta, are both members of the workgroup.

Rich Johnson, the line supervisor for the fish hatchery from the Portland area office was in attendance. Doug Olson, the hatchery assessment team leader from Vancouver, Wash., also attended.

"The team has an abundance of expertise in many areas rang-

ing from salmon to tribal culture and tradition," said fish hatchery assistant manager Mavis Shaw.

Gaskill said the cost of the project would be slightly more than \$500,000.

"I think we are in a unique position as to where we can expect to get funding through a number of grants," she said.

Gaskill cited the fact that the Warm Springs Fish Hatchery is one of the first facilities to balance a program of hatchery production while maintaining abundant, self-sustaining runs of all naturally occurring fish species.

Plans call for the workgroup to ultimately meet with tribal members to get their input on what they would like to see in the visitor center. In the meantime, the group is working to secure funding and will continue to meet to develop existing ideas.

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