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# SMOKE SIGNALS

THE CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE GRAND RONDE COMMUNITY OF OREGON JUNE 1993

## First Year of Head Start Ends

By Tracy Olson

For the past school year, nineteen tribal and community children have been attending the Tribe's first Head Start early childhood education program, the first of its kind in Grand Ronde. It was developed in conjunction with YCAP (Yamhill Community Action Program) which operates out of McMinnville, Oregon.

The schoolhouse is located on a piece of tribally-owned property behind the Alcohol and Drug offices in Grand Ronde. Main staff are: Angela Bedortha, Teacher, Mary Cook, Assistant Teacher, and June Olson, Family Services Advocate. Angie described this year's class, and some of the things they have learned.

"Of our nineteen children, half are enrolled in the Tribe," she said. "Some parents who work for the Tribe bring their kids from Sheridan, Dallas, and Salem. With the exception of a few four-year olds, I am confident the class is socially and emotionally prepared for kindergarten."

One thing emphasized to parents and the community about Head Start is the difference between the program and daycare or even another pre-school.

Said Angie, "We discuss the differences and similarities between the different cultures. A lot of children don't have current concepts of what a Native American is." This includes presenting an anti-biased curriculum and talking about cultures the children may not come in contact with every day. She continued, "All Head Start programs do this. We emphasize Native American culture, while others may focus on the Hispanic or black culture, etc."

Throughout the year, the children have learned to count in Chinook jargon, they've read Native American stories, and recently made a traditional talking stick. Whoever is holding the talking stick gets to speak, while others must listen. This has been a good way of teaching tradition and courteous behavior at the same time.

As Family Services Advocate, June Olson goes on many home visits and offers support to parents whose children are in Head Start.

"This program is not about assistance and social services. It's about working as a group. We all support each other. Parents support each other. It's a cooperative effort in the community. I help families set up goals, break down barriers...for whatever they want; college, transportation, child care for other children, etc," said June.



Head Start class picture with Angie Bedortha (left) and Mary Cook.

June's position at head Start was an experiment---no other YCAP Head Start had a Family Services Advocate, but it worked so well, next year she'll work for Willamina Head Start as well as Grand Ronde.

During a regular class day, the children are only in school for four hours. Angie and Mary use this time to try to set up a routine; impress upon the children certain socialization concepts and life skills. These include cooperation, mutual problem-solving, ideas, communication, and space-sharing. The children are expected to get along, but if there is a problem, Mary and Angie don't take sides.

"The children are encouraged to solve the problem with words. We help them talk about their feelings to each other, and the importance of respecting other people. They know their opinions are valued, even at this age," explained Angie. "It feels so good when I hear a child say, 'I know, we can play with it together!'"

Another encouraging point is that Grand Ronde Head Start has the highest level of parental involvement in YCAP.

"We would definitely like to see more parents in the classroom," said June. "Ideally, we'd like to see each parent in class for about four hours per month. This enables us to show parents some of the techniques we use in teaching, so they can continue the process at home. That way, we know we are nurturing the areas of development. Parents are the real teachers, the real role models." The four areas of development are: emotional, physical, intellectual, and social.

The staff is very grateful for the contributions the Tribe has made to this program. Hopefully, the Tribe will take over the program completely, if a grant proposal is approved.