

# Ross hired as Tribal speech language pathologist

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Sarah Ross, who has served as a speech therapist contractor for the Tribe since 2011, is now serving in that capacity on staff at the Tribal Health and Wellness Clinic as of May 20.

"I've always been very interested in the oral tradition, storytelling and healing practices of Native culture, and I felt that my role as a Tribal member is a combination of those. Speech therapy kind of fit with that," she said.

She received a master's degree in Speech Language Pathology at Portland State University in 2009.

She serves about 20 youth, from birth to 18 years of age, and hopes to begin treating adult Tribal members or their descendants, as well as community members covered by Shasta, Providence or Oregon Health Plan insurance in the near future.

Statistically, the number of people with speech problems is about 8 percent to 9 percent of the population, Ross said, or for approximately 5,000 members of the Grand Ronde Tribe, about 400 to 450 people, including adults and children.

"There should be more people accessing the service than are now," she said. "One of the reasons Native SLPs are needed in Tribal communities is because Native American children are often over identified for communication disorders by non-Native SLPs. This is due to a lack of understanding of cultural communication and learning styles."

Ross said that parents can see the signs of communication difficulties when "youth are not interacting with peers as others do. Maybe the child has difficulty with reading, writing or spelling. Oftentimes, children with language disorders have difficulty managing their behavior. They have increased emotional outbursts. Language is the foundation for everything we do. If our communication is affected, then



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Sarah Ross, Tribal speech and language pathologist, makes the sound that the letters "v" and "u" make together for Brandon Thorsgard, 6, to repeat while working on speech exercises with him on Monday, June 3.**

we might have difficulties socially, emotionally and academically."

In the younger years, the following may be signs of communication difficulties:

- No gestures, like pointing or reaching, before 12 months of age;
- Having less than 20 words by 18 months;
- And older children may have difficulty making friends.

"When a child has a communication disorder, more frequent emotional outbursts may happen because they cannot effectively communicate with caregivers or peers," Ross said.

She looks to parents to help. "Parents are the experts with their own children," she said. "I have an open-door policy with families. Parents are always welcome."

"The kind of therapy I do is very unique," she said. "Less than 1 percent, some 300, of all speech therapists in the country are Native American, and of those 300, even fewer speak their Tribal language."

"There is a lack of cultural competency training in speech/language therapy for Native American communities. I really want to emphasize incorporating the cultural piece

into this because it is so unique in the field.

"We have predominantly non-Native therapists serving Native communities. They do not understand the cultural implications of our language, the way we interact socially, the way Native communities view disorders and medical conditions, and so it's a unique thing I'm starting here by incorporating the rich cultural traditions from Grand Ronde in my treatment of Grand Ronde people."

Ross is currently working with colleagues to describe her work in research publications for non-Native speech language pathologists. The goal is to help them with knowledge of Tribal culture and communications to provide more effective treatment in Native com-

munities.

While at Portland State, Ross taught in an urban classroom for homeless youth. She led a literacy outreach program for at-risk youth in Portland.

She managed curriculum for Kiwanis stroke camps, addressing stroke survivors and their families by providing art and other therapy activities. Care providers had time alone to cope with the responsibilities of being a caregiver.

She was a speech language pathologist for K-12 special education and then worked in early intervention.

Before taking on speech therapy at the Tribe, she started working here through the local Head Start program, also making early intervention a priority.

Education Department Manager April Campbell reported being "very grateful" that the Tribe supported a full-time speech language pathologist.

"The Tribe is fortunate to have this position represented by Sarah. She is a Tribal member and youth enjoy working with her," Campbell said.

Campbell said that youth needing the services "can experience a variety of teasing and bullying" that discourages youth participation in classroom exercises or reading assignments.

The speech language pathologist is a key part of the support services these youth need, Campbell said.

"I'm so glad to be here," Ross said. "This is where I always wanted to be." ■

## Volleyball nights held on Wednesdays

The Tribe's Recreation Program holds open volleyball from 5 to 7 p.m. Wednesday in the Tribal gym. Volleyball is open to anyone wanting to participate. For more information, contact Recreation Coordinator Matthew Mosley at 503-879-1369 or matthew.mosley@grandronde.org. ■

## BOOK FOR SALE

"The Kalapuyans: A sourcebook on the Indians of the Willamette Valley" by Harold Mackey, Ph.D.



This book, through collaboration between the Cultural Resources Department, Mission Mill Museum, and the Mackey Family, has been re-released in a second edition with a new cover, an updated bibliography with more current and accurate sources, new photographs, and a new afterward explaining the Grand Ronde Tribal perspective.

\$13.00 per book

Books may be purchased from the Tribe's Cultural Resources Department located on the second floor of Tribal Building 14 (Adult Education Building) for \$13.00 each. To have an order mailed to you, please fill out this form and include an additional \$3.00 for shipping cost per book.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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# of books x \$15.95 each = \_\_\_\_\_ total.

Checks only.



Mail this form to:

CTGR Cultural Resources  
The Kalapuyans  
9615 Grand Ronde Road  
Grand Ronde, OR  
97347

## Helpline Provides Free, Confidential Crisis Intervention and Resources

As 2012 begins, Oregon Partnership offers a reminder about our free, confidential alcohol and drug Helpline (800-923-HELP; 800-923-4357).

Highly trained volunteers and staff provide compassionate assistance to people in crisis as well as to family members and friends concerned about loved ones.

The line operates 24/7, responding to those seeking crisis intervention and resources that help them heal.

### YouthLine

A peer-to-peer crisis line for teens. Chat online [www.OregonYouthline.org](http://www.OregonYouthline.org). Youth working under the supervision of an adult answer calls on diverse topics including substance abuse, depression, self-harm, dating violence and other issues, many of which have substance abuse as an underlying issue. Call 877-YOUTH-911 - (877) 968-8491

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