

Tribe reduces foster care numbers

Prevention efforts replacing crisis management in dealing with troubled families

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Over the last five years, the Grand Ronde Tribe has seen the number of Tribal children in foster care drop by more than 50 percent, from 100 in 2009 to 47 in 2013.

The success has come mainly by preventing new children and families from entering the foster care system, said Dana Ainam-Leno, supervisor of the Tribe's Children and Family Services Division in the Social Services Department.

The decrease comes "by being proactive, by making connections with families and by giving them the support they need," she said.

Instead of crisis management, prevention services are currently favored nationally across the social services profession, Ainam-Leno said.

Last year, Children and Family Services received 255 reports of possible abuse and 44 of those were referred to the investigative arm of the division.

"Most of the reports do not rise to the level of abuse or neglect required by the Children and Families Ordinance," said Ainam-Leno, "and for others, there was not enough information to go forward."

In a typical year, Children and Family Services serves about 30 families through prevention services, but not many progress to the courts. With the prevention model, Tribal Court did not review a new petition involving abuse or neglect in 2013, Ainam-Leno said.

State social services departments and courts serve those who are not and cannot be enrolled in the Tribe. The state also may take Tribal member cases where the location of the family's home makes it difficult for the Tribe to serve them.

It may be that the Tribe, for any number of reasons, is not the best agency to provide for a family's needs, she added.

The state system takes Tribal and non-Tribal families; the Tribal foster care system only serves Tribal children and families.

Tribal members are all over, said Ainam-Leno, and services can best be provided locally.

"There are many cases where the Tribe chooses to allow the state social services departments and

Children and Family Services staff

For questions about parenting classes and prevention services, Amber Amouak, the Tribe's CFS Prevention caseworker, is available at 503-879-2147.

For questions about foster care, Amanda Mercier, Foster Care coordinator, is available for questions at 503-879-2039.

For more general questions, lead caseworker for the CFS program, Kristi Petite, can be reached at 503-879-2045, and Ainam-Leno is at 503-879-2037.

end, but with less foster care, fewer court cases, better contracted programs and reduced staff time, the model is saving at the back end.

"Without new funds, we are able to allocate funds differently," said Ainam-Leno.

A March program assessment through the National Resource Center for Tribes, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, found that the Tribe's division has a committed staff, places value in the work it does in the community, and has a lot of strengths with a quality program that does a better job of engaging families and meeting their needs.

The assessment also said that the division could still do a better job of helping families understand the process.

"They wanted to know that families feel the time spent on their family dynamics is worthwhile, that they have a voice in the process and that their opinions are valued," she said.

When resistance comes from families, it reflects the reality that so much is at stake, said Ainam-Leno.

The week-long review included focus groups attended by Elders, current and former families involved with the program, community partners and the state Department of Human Services.

The goal was "to build on the things we do well and improve the areas where we struggle," said Ainam-Leno.

Among Elders, the feeling was that the program needed to rebuild the sense of community that they remember from the early days of the Tribe. Even though poverty plagued the community, there was a time, Elders said, when all worked together. People feel more disconnected from the community now, they observed.

Many are, however, excited about coming phases of the prevention effort. ■

Exhibits tell the Grand Ronde story

CHACHALU continued from front page

artifacts and items into the Tribe's collections have increased substantially. Also, people are coming forward with offers to volunteer after our opening."

Chachalu has already started holding cultural classes in two classrooms and has an interactive iPad station with a new language application where people can practice Chinuk Wawa.

"That's the reason that we are here," said Reibach, "to help connect Tribal members with their culture, with their artifacts and with their history. After all, those things belong to them."

The museum building, the former Willamina Middle School that was purchased by the Tribe in 2011, is partly sheathed in cedar donated by Willamette National Forest. The whole building will have a cedar exterior when completed.

At the entrance of the museum is an exhibit showing the plankhouse experience.

The collections room holds one of the largest basket collections in the Pacific Northwest. On display is a piece of Tomanowos, also known as the Willamette meteorite.

Exhibits tell the Grand Ronde story, a history of more than 14,000 years up to present-day Grand Ronde.

"So many folks have worked hard for years to make this dream a reality," said Reibach. "Tribal Council's support of Tribal culture and the

If you go

Grand opening of Chachalu, the Tribal Museum and Cultural Center

When: 4 p.m. Thursday, June 5

Where: 8720 Grand Ronde Road

What: The opening ceremony will occur outside, weather permitting, and include an opening prayer, drum song, welcome, Tribal Council member remarks and recognitions. Those attending will be able to walk through the facility from 4:45 to 6:30 p.m. Light refreshments will be provided.

More information: Call 503-879-2226

direction for this project have paved the way to put this together. Staff here is working as a team in developing the many processes to manage Chachalu now that we have a facility in place."

Chachalu is at 8720 Grand Ronde Road. The opening ceremony will occur outside, weather permitting, and include an opening prayer, drum song, welcome, Tribal Council member remarks and recognitions. Those attending will be able to walk through the facility from 4:45 to 6:30 p.m.

Light refreshments will be provided.

For more information, contact the Tribe's Land & Culture Department at 503-879-2226. ■

Adult Foster Program



The Tribe's Adult Foster Care lodges are committed to offering quality care to our Elders and helping them remain as independent as possible, while providing the personalized assistance they need. At our lodges, a wide range of services is available in a comfortable setting where privacy is respected and maximum independence is supported. For information, contact the Adult Foster Program Director at 503-879-1694. ■