

Tribal Head Start receives an A+

Perfect score means less frequent federal reviews in the future

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

The Tribal Head Start program was recently evaluated on more than 2,000 regulations and standards, and succeeded on every one.

Staff has taken to calling the program a Gold Star program, but officially, said Sandy Bobb, Enrollment and Transportation lead, "It is just a perfect review."

Staff members from the federal Administration for Children & Families, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services division responsible for Head Start, evaluate the Tribal program every three years. This year, six evaluators did their work over five days in April.

Head Start has pre-natal and infant services, early childhood services up to age 5, services for teen parents and all are wrapped in full family services that bring parents into the planning and decision-making.

"We have always been involved," said Keri Kimsey, secretary for the Tribal Employment Rights Office. Keri and her partner, Sean Kylonen, enrolled their two children.

Her oldest, Ben, 4, is now in the Mawich classroom for 4- and 5-year-olds, but he started in the program when he was eight months old. Her youngest, Reed, nine months, is enrolled in the home-based program. Keri started her involvement with

Tribal Head Start five years ago before Ben was born.

"The parents are the ones who set the curriculum," she said. "We let the home-based visitor know what we are interested in and they try to come up with field trips, activities or socializations based around your interest."

The program, she said, gives parents "constant encouragement to be involved in your child's journey."

The federal evaluation gave the Tribal Head Start program a rating of seven out of a possible seven on "positive climate," "teacher sensitivity" and "productivity."

Willie and Jilene Mercier, who work for the Tribe as Web designer and Economic Development Projects coordinator, respectively, enrolled their children in the program — Audrey for two and Tyler for two-and-a-half school years.

Audrey, now almost 10, "started when she was 3 and was developmentally behind. She barely spoke 10 words," said Jilene. "Over the two years she received help with speech and made great progress early on. By the time she reached kindergarten, you wouldn't have been able to tell she had prior learning disabilities."

Audrey just completed the fourth grade and her state OAKS test score fell in the "exceeds" category. The Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test assesses students' mastery of Oregon content standards.

"Tyler, 6, just finished kindergarten last week and his teacher had to find new challenges every day for him. He is so eager to keep learn-

ing. He is reading at first-second grade level and doing first-grade math," said Jilene.

This is the fourth evaluation for the Head Start program and the first time the program has had a perfect evaluation.

Even in the past, few problems have come up — never affecting children or families — but this year was something special. Success for students and families and pride in the program are the big rewards, but the perfect score also allows Tribal Head Start to apply for future evaluations on a five-year timetable instead of three.

The Tribal program also performs yearly self-assessments that monitor outcomes. In consultation with families, teachers set short-term goals for every student. Also, said Early Childhood Education Program Manager Vikki Bishop, 90 percent of the program's 28 employees are currently engaged in professional development, such as college classes.

A Policy Council, comprised of seven parents and two members of the community, governs the program. It approves budgets, policies, procedures, curricula and child outcomes, and members of the Policy Council are at the table for hiring and firing decisions.

Many on staff serve on boards and committees outside of Grand Ronde, Bishop said, to win support for Head Start in Grand Ronde. "This gives Tribal programs a place at the table, and makes sure that the Tribal voice is heard," she said.

Tribal Head Start has been so successful, she said, that "we are the go-to program in the area."

Evaluating eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment and attendance, said Bobb, "ensures that the program is enrolling the most needy children, based on eligibility requirements, in our community."

The program enrolls Tribal members whose family incomes fall below the federal poverty level first. For positions that remain open, any Native American family living below the poverty level is next, and then descendants and members of the community. Descendants of Tribal members are considered community members by the federal government, said Bishop.

The waiting list for Tribal Head Start ranges from 20 to 60 each year.

The program is split into four divisions: Transportation and ERSEA (enrollment issues), led by Bobb; Health and Family Partnership, led by Tracy Biery; Disabilities led by Toni Lockwood, who is also a head teacher; and Education led by Kristina Jaquith, also a head teacher.

This year, these divisions serve 22 home-based students and families, and 55 2- to 5-year-old students and their families. The program's commitment to families means that the Tribe effectively reaches children from birth to 5, and families from the pre-natal stage to teens with children.

Two home visitor staff positions assess individual family needs and

provide services to pregnant mothers and children up to 2 years old. The point is to help families learn at home.

Home lessons cover many ways that help families live in their communities, said Biery. "It can be so hard to navigate. We teach how to do it."

The method makes suggestions, for example, that parents cook with their children, hike with them and talk about the things they see along the way. Home visitors also focus on teaching parents songs they can sing with their children and on buying nourishing food.

Every student is assessed on a regular basis in such areas as self-regulation, interpersonal skills, math, letter names and sounds.

In a January letter sent to the program, Carrie Zimbrick, principal of Willamina Elementary School, reported, "Our Native students were slightly higher than our white students in all categories except math, and they were higher in all categories compared to other Native students in the state. Your program is doing such a great job. Our students that come to us from your program continue to be some of our top students throughout elementary school."

Tribal children coming out of Head Start compare favorably at Willamina in health care, too. In addition to Zimbrick's statistics, Tribal students who go through the Tribal program have a 100-percent immunization rate, compared with a 40-percent rate for students at Willamina Elementary without Head Start.


Regarding a child's overall health, the program follows recommendations for preventive pediatric care from the American Academy of Pediatrics. It makes sure children have vaccinations, and screens for good health in oral, vision and hearing areas. The program keeps track of every student's history and developing body measurements. It also tracks for behavioral and other developmental issues.

Federal funding this year cut 5 percent from the Tribal program. At the same time, Tribal Council steps up every year with cash and in-kind support. In cash this year, Tribal Council has offered \$150,000 with a program match. Clinic services make up the largest in-kind services to the program, but Tribal Council also provides facility maintenance, transportation liability insurance and social services to the program.

Funding also comes from the federal Head Start that pays for 50 children. The federal Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program, state and non-profit funds also support the program's \$650,000 budget.

"Everybody plays a role," said Bishop, "from our committed staff to our bus monitors, to our cooks."

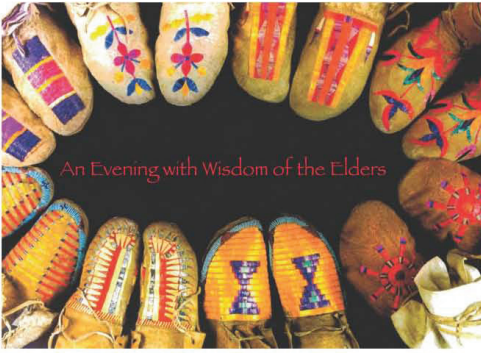
Among Oregon Tribes, Umatilla, Warm Springs, Coquille and Siletz also have Head Start programs. Only Warm Springs and Grand Ronde have early Head Start. ■



Wisdom of the Elders

Native American cultural sustainability, multimedia education, and race reconciliation

Providence Health & Services Presents: The Third Annual "Evening with Wisdom of the Elders"
Including a salmon dinner, cultural arts presentations, and silent auction



An Evening with Wisdom of the Elders

Friday, June 20, 2014
The Melody Ballroom
614 SE Alder Street
Portland, OR 97214

5:30pm VIP Golden Hour
(special guests and sponsor guests)


6:30pm Dinner and
Cultural Arts Program begins

Tickets available at:
<http://aneveningwithwisdom.bpt.com>

Keynote Speakers
David G. Lewis, PhD
Tribal Historian, Land and Culture Department Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde



James Mason, PhD
Manager of Diversity Education and Cultural Competence for the Oregon Region Providence Health and Services.
Senior Project Consultant for the National Center on Cultural Competence at Georgetown University.



Thank you to Presenting Sponsor: **Providence Health & Services**




Thank you to Lead Sponsors:
Center for Diversity and Inclusion at Oregon Health & Science University, Metro, Oregon Health Authority

Thank you to Sponsors:
City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, Multnomah County Office of Sustainability



www.wisdomoftheelders.org