

Minor's Trust Fund program totals \$170 million so far

**MONEY continued
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as possible the younger adults that have gone through the program to talk to us about your experiences.”

George said Tribal leaders want input from Tribal members who have been through the program. He said they want to know what worked and didn't work, as well as ways to improve the program.

George also addressed rumors that Tribal Council intended to change policies regarding Tribal members receiving their funds at age 21.

“This is an opportunity to talk as family and as a community,” George said. “I want to make sure that I tell you from the start this is not about changing the amount of money invested in the program or taking money away. ... This is all about talking to you and listening to you talk about the program and how to make it better.”

George said the Minor's Trust Fund program has been in place for 21 years and provided \$170 million to Tribal members.

“That's a big deal,” George said. “It's a program that provides up-and-coming 21 year olds with \$100,000 or more. And soon it will be more than that so it's a big deal. It's an important program. We're doing this meeting in Grand Ronde to start the conversation.”

George said that Tribal Council has directed staff to plan three more meetings on the topic in Eugene, Portland and Salem. He also said staff is discussing how to include members throughout the country in the discussions and that they have been looking at different options on how to make that happen.

Tribal Council Vice Chair Cheryle



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~ Steve Bobb Sr.

A. Kennedy shared her thoughts on young Tribal members and how to manage their money.

“We wanted to make sure that our young people, our children and the generations to come will have opportunities that we as terminated people didn't have,” Kennedy said. “Many opportunities weren't afforded to us, but we wanted them for our children. We wanted to make sure that your futures were secure. We knew that we lived in a poverty era and we didn't want that for our children.”

Attendees broke into seven small groups of 10 to 12 people. Each group was moderated and ideas from each group were written down on flip charts.

At each set of tables was a questionnaire for people to fill out. Staff wanted to know from participants if they had received their trust funds or if they were about to receive them. The questionnaire asked people who had received the money how it had been used.

Staff also asked participants if they had a chance to do it all over again would they do anything differently and if those who had been through the program had any suggestions on how to make it better.

The questionnaire also sought to know if participants felt like they needed to talk to someone about their experience and asked for

contact information so staff could follow up.

Tribal members Bryan Langley, Mercedes Reeves, Meghan Zimbrick, Angie Blackwell, Leslie Riggs, Cristina Lara and Angey Rideout acted as moderators and they were assisted by Elaine Lane, Dana Ainam, Audra Sherwood and Chris Martin.

Tribal members intensely discussed how to best assist the Tribe's young people in handling sudden wealth.

Many participants were grandparents and parents of young people who had been through good and bad experiences with their funds and were willing to share what they had experienced.

One father of a young Tribal member shared their discussion about his son receiving quarterly per capita payments and how he taught his son the reality of what it is like to pay bills with your money instead of having it put away for the future. He told his son that if he took the per capita money then he would have to make his own car, insurance and cell phone payments, and pay his share of the family bills instead of his parents.

Other groups came up with a list of resources they would like to see provided to each young member before receiving life-changing sums of money and also after the money has been distributed.

One group shared that they thought staggering payments might be a good idea and that they would like to see an educational requirement like a GED or completion of a financial literacy class before the funds are distributed.

“We feel as parents of kids who have gotten the money that we need more information on the money – what the taxes are going to be and that kind of thing,” a Tribal mother said. “Just more information before that money comes.”

One family shared that they would like to see people share their stories with young people who are about to receive their funds. One Tribal father suggested the sharing of those experiences, both good and bad, as a way to show young people both sides of the issue.

Tribal Elder and former Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. sat in on one of the group discussions. Afterward he shared what his group had discussed.

“This is a very passionate subject for me,” Bobb said. “I think what a lot of us have talked about at these tables is the exact same thing. What we talked about was information and also education for the parents. We need to educate the parents on what they need to be telling their kids and grandkids what to do.”

Bobb used his own family as an example.

“That's what we did. I had a couple of my grandkids turn 21 and two of them are going to turn 21 this year and I've got a pile more coming up,” Bobb said. “In the end what will work is it's going to have to be information and education.”

One young Tribal member said that many of the members at her table had recently turned 21 and would be willing to talk to other Tribal members about to receive their money in an effort to help them make informed choices.

“We could talk to them and say this is what's available, this is what I did. Here are some options,” she said.

Once the discussions wrapped up, George complimented the people who participated and said discussions will be ongoing.

“You took a huge step tonight,” George said.

Two days before the meeting on March 15, Tribal Council member Kathleen George said on a podcast hosted by fellow Tribal Council member Chris Mercier that she was most concerned with negative reactions she had seen online to having the meeting.

“I think there has been some strong reactions, both positive and negative, to what is really a community conversation,” Kathleen George said. “This is an opportunity to talk about an important program – one of many the Tribe has – which is how we administer the minor's trust funds, how those funds are delivered to Tribal members and the experience they have when they come into a great deal of money.”

Kathleen George said that in her discussions with people that some are saying the discussion is long overdue and others are saying that they feel Tribal Council has no business asking anyone any questions about their finances.

“The opinions that are the most concerning to me are some very vehement opinions that said you shouldn't even be able to talk about this,” Kathleen George said. “It almost feels like a suspicion of motives or kind of pre-judging the conversation before the conversation even gets to happen that really somehow suspects that the motive of even having a conversation is somehow bad or wrong.”

“I think it's the kind of conversation we should be having and I think it does our whole Tribe a disservice to suggest that we shouldn't even be able to have these conversations. I think that flies in the face of having our membership be more involved in our government so I hope we are going to have more of these conversations.”

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno and Tribal Council member Jack Giffen Jr. stood nearby and took the whole scene in together.

“It's good for this meeting to happen,” Leno said. “But many of these things are already in place for the membership and Baird (Robert W. Baird investment consultants) can help people with their investments when they turn 21. So I guess this is an opportunity to expand the education process for everyone.” ■



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