

Healing a generation

Tribal members involved in new project aimed at young adults

By Danielle Frost

Smoke Signals staff writer

While attending Grand Ronde's Youth Wellness Warrior Camp held in Grand Ronde during the summer of 2017, Kyoni Mercier, Andrea Grijalva and Shalene Joseph noticed something amiss: Their friends were no longer coming around.

Mercier and Grijalva, 20, are both Grand Ronde Tribal members. Joseph, 25, is Aaniih and the daughter of Native Wellness Institute founder and Executive Director Jillene Joseph.

"We started a conversation about what the gap was and found out we felt too old for youth camps, but too young for the adult camps," Joseph said. "So, my mom asked us to set aside time to talk about healing for our generation."

Seventeen young adults from across Indian Country shared their personal experiences and the discussion at achaf-hammi, the Tribal plankhouse, lasted seven hours.

Those gathered didn't want the conversation to end and decided they would do something to promote healing. From there, the Indigenous 20 Something Project was born. It is an interTribal movement focused on promoting, creating and sustaining healthy and lasting collaborations among indigenous 20-somethings, according to the group's website, with the overall goal of stopping the effects of inter-generational trauma.

"We wanted to do something with the conversation we had," Shalene Joseph said. "The plan was that we



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

From left, Shalene Joseph, Kyoni Mecier and Andrea Grijalva are part of a group of young adults from across Indian Country involved with starting the Indigenous 20 Something Project. According to its website, the Indigenous 20 Something Project is an interTribal movement focused on healing a generation by promoting, creating, and sustaining healthy and lasting collaborations among indigenous 20-somethings.

would reach out to friends, draft a mission statement and go from there. ... It is all work coming from collaboration."

A few months later, the project was launched and three facilitators, Joseph, Jordan Cocker, 27, and Josh Cocker, 25, began traveling all over the country on a weekly basis and speaking to different indigenous communities.

It was a hectic time for Shalene Joseph, who was also earning her master's degree in American Indian Studies from UCLA.

"It has been nice, but very busy,"

she said.

During the past year, Grand Ronde Prevention Coordinator Cristina Lara has helped as one of the group's mentors, along with Jillene Joseph of the Gresham-based Native Wellness Institute.

Another part of the project is spotlighting different indigenous 20-something men and women who are working to help their communities.

Mercier and Grijalva, both students at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, were recruited to help run the summer leadership camps, focused on Native youth ages 8 to 11. The goal is to help participants understand and better connect with their self-identity.

"We used to be participants in these camps," Mercier said. "Now, we are taking our lifestyle and connecting it to youth in other places and being an example of traditional

living. NWI has always been welcomed and our Tribe owes a lot to them."

Grijalva said it is an opportunity to heal themselves by helping others.

"This has been my dream for a long time," she said. "I can't remember when I haven't wanted to be a part of the Native Wellness Institute. I was learning and taking in everything I could about my culture to be better prepared. They impacted my life in such a good way."

Through the experience of helping other youth, Mercier and Grijalva also have realized how fortunate they are.

"A lot of the kids come from reservations where they don't have the right help," Grijalva said. "Just going to the camp for a week and having somewhere they can get the help means a lot."

"You hear feedback from them that having us there was the highlight of their summer," Mercier said. "It humbles you and makes you more aware of your own self-worth. ... You can make your culture a career. Don't let anyone tell you these practices won't take you anywhere. It will take you everywhere and deepen your connections to others."

The three agree that the sacrifices of the Elders before them, and the resulting effects on indigenous families and communities, has helped create an atmosphere where positive change can occur.

"We know we can do it. ... We are coming from a place of abundance" Shalene Joseph said. "Something my mom always tells us is that we are the answer to our ancestors' prayers. It is really important to focus on that."

For more information on the Indigenous 20 Something Project, visit indigenous20somethingproject.wordpress.com. ■

REWARD

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- Browning BAR semi-auto .243 & 3x9 Nikon scope (blued with wood stock)
- Browning semi-auto .22 (blued with wood stock)
- Henry Golden Boy lever action .22 (blued with wood stock & gold accents)
- Remington bolt action .22 (blued with wood stock)
- Howa bolt action .22-250 & scope (blued with black synthetic stock)
- Savage bolt action .25-06 (blued with black synthetic stock)
- Blued .380 revolver (with black sheath)
- Thompson Costender handgun with .223 barrel (blued with wood stock)

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