

Kimsey is new Young Child Wellness Community coordinator

By Danielle Frost
Smoke Signals staff writer

To say the Kimsey family is well-known in Grand Ronde would be putting it lightly. Marvin Kimsey was a key Restoration leader and his family has carried on that legacy through their work with the Tribe.

Now, granddaughter Keri Kimsey, 29, is helping the Tribe’s youngest members as the Young Child Wellness Community coordinator. It is a position that is new to the Tribe and grant funded.

“When I heard about this job, it sounded perfect,” she said. “It’s an opportunity to work with families, the community and wellness.”

Kimsey began working for the Tribe nine years ago in the Head Start preschool program.

“I soon realized working with children was really meaningful for me,” she said.

After the Tribe enacted its Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance in 2014, she joined her father, Duke Kimsey, in that department, serving as its secretary. TERO was formed to provide quality services for the Grand Ronde Reservation and surrounding region by increasing and enhancing employment opportunities, and promoting Tribal and Indian preference in contracting and subcontracting.

Kimsey began her new job a month ago, with the main goal being development of positive relationships with families in the Grand Ronde community and connection with current programs serving children and families. Kimsey’s job is funded through the Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children’s Health, or LAUNCH. It is a childhood wellness program targeted at children from birth through 8 years old.

According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, which funds the program, LAUNCH focuses on the wellness

of young children by addressing the physical, social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral aspects of their development. The goal of Project LAUNCH is to “create a shared vision for the wellness of young children that drives the development of federal, state, territorial, Tribal and locally-based networks for the coordination of key child-serving systems and the integration of behavioral and physical health services.”

The desired result is for children to thrive in safe, supportive environments, and enter school ready to learn and succeed. The five-year grant doesn’t require matching funds.

“We are looking at how we can collaborate with our efforts, and also create a liaison between internal and external social service agencies,” Kimsey said. “The goal is to have kids ready for school and able to thrive. There has been a huge need for this because of behavioral health issues in school. We want to give kids and families tools and resources to help.”

Internal agencies included in the effort will be the Tribe’s Education, Social Services and Health & Wellness departments. Outside partners include county social service agencies and area school districts.

Health & Wellness Quality Improvement Manager Dawn Doar is also serving as LAUNCH director.

“Right now the focus of the program is serving Tribal children, families and descendants,” Doar said. “We are very excited about it. This is a huge opportunity for the Tribe.”

During her first year on the job,



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Keri Kimsey, 29, is helping the Tribe’s youngest members as the Young Child Wellness Community coordinator. It is a position that is new to the Tribe and grant funded.

Kimsey will attend community events, and network with children and families to gauge the highest priority needs.

“The first year of the grant is identifying needs and putting together a plan,” Doar said. “The second year we roll it out. Keri’s job is to research and gather information so we can engage people in the process.”

Kimsey said her nine years working for the Tribe and growing up in Grand Ronde have prepared her for this task.

“I realize how many programs we have that are geared toward kids,” she said. “It will make my job much easier in providing resources when we have the services already in place. I really enjoy being able to work with people in these programs, and start a new adventure of child wellness and family services. Everyone here has been really supportive and they are

excited for me.” Doar describes Kimsey as a “breath of fresh air.”

“She really hit the ground running and is not afraid to try new ideas, and blaze a trail,” she said.

When she’s not working, Kimsey enjoys spending time with boyfriend Sean Kyllonen and sons Ben, 9, and Reed, 5, as well as attending her sons’ sporting events. She also likes music, cooking and camping.

“The Tribe has been a big part of my family’s life and my connection with the community motivates me to do the best that I can to serve,” Kimsey said.

Added Doar, “Keri is a great fit for this position and it’s a good opportunity for her to learn all about the specifics of grant work, and also to help the Tribe move closer to meeting needs for all of our kids.”

Kimsey can be reached at 503-879-3476 or keri.kimsey@grandronde.org. ■



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