

Event focused on the often-overlooked issue of abused men

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
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hurt.” As she worked on adorning her T-shirt, Tribal member Jessica Holmes said she has “dealt with abuse and stuff in the past, so I just wanted to see what the Tribe has to offer, regardless of whether it’s for female or male.”

She said she was glad to see programs available for both men and women.

This year’s event focused on the often-overlooked issue of abused men. Boys, as well as girls, are subject to physical, emotional and sexual abuse as children, leaving them with lifelong trauma, the risk of growing up to abuse others, and risk for alcoholism, substance abuse and suicide.

Although male abuse victims are less common than female victims, adult men can also be subjected to physical and emotional abuse. However, it is often much harder for men to find help, speakers told the crowd. In addition, they said, men are not always believed, and can find it deeply embarrassing and difficult to speak about their abuse or to ask for help.

Tribal member Joe Ulestad delivered the invocation and a drum song. Ulestad also talked about his own experiences with abuse and the difficulty of speaking out. He now works as a peer support specialist in the Tribe’s Behavioral Health department.

Tribal General Manager Angie Blackwell attended as well as Tribal Council member Kathleen George.

“I’m just so proud of the work the Warriors of Hope are doing for our Tribal community,” George said. “This work is so important and so



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal member Joe Ulestad shares his story as a guest speaker at the Warriors of Hope Program’s Domestic Violence Awareness Month event in the Tribal gym on Saturday, Oct. 26.

needed. Everybody needs to know there’s a safe place they can go, with people to listen to them and believe them.”

Cousins and Tribal members Fabian Quenelle and Ferrell DeGarmo also shared their stories with the audience. All three men emphasized the importance, for men, of seeking healing for their pain, both for their own sakes and to become safer people for their families. It’s a hard thing to do, they acknowledged, but said there are fellow Tribal members who will hold out their arms to offer aid and belief.

DeGarmo said for generations now, people have been brought up to shut their feelings away.

“A lot of what colonization has brought to us, it has normalized not to do three things: Don’t talk. Don’t feel. Don’t trust,” he said. “So, we’ve

normalized ‘Whatever happens in the home, we’re not going to talk about it. We’re not going to have feelings about it.’”

But those beliefs only intensify the damage.

“When we don’t trust anyone, how can we work through our depression?” he said. “When we don’t talk, that depression sits in us. ... We’ve got to start talking — to therapists, to our peers, to our friends. That’s where we start to heal.”

Behavioral Health Lead Therapist Maret Banks told the audience that violence is pervasive throughout Indigenous communities.

“A lot of our work as therapists is unlearning the violence that’s been around us all our lives,” she said.

Symptoms can include separation anxiety, anxiety in response to certain sounds, generalized anxiety or panic, loss of identity, confusion about masculinity, shame, co-dependency, law enforcement involvement and “unhealthy attitudes and beliefs about women, sexual relationships and love,” and sexual disinformation, she said.

“One thing that sets men and women apart is that men have a much, much higher rate of completing suicide and substance abuse,” Banks said. “And we think that has a lot to do with society and not being allowed to have feelings about it. A lot of the victims of abuse I’ve worked with don’t know what they even like, how to relax or what makes them happy.”

Ulestad told the audience that when he realized he wanted help, it was hard to know exactly what to do.

“I didn’t know how to pray,” he said.

But eventually a friend invited him to a healing ceremony. He tried to decline. “I said no, I’m 400 pounds, my knees hurt,” he said, giving a litany of excuses. “The guy said, ‘No, you have to come sweat,’” promising aid for every issue that Ulestad raised. He went to the ceremony, and with his friend’s encouragement, began attending a regular men’s circle, beginning his long journey toward healing. Today, he said, he has been clean and sober for five years, and feels honored to work with other men who are seeking help for pain long

kept secret.

“Men, you don’t have to be calling the cops,” he said. “You can lean into one of us — get to the mountains, to the river, go to a lodge. There’s other ways to get help. We don’t got to be ashamed to heal, as guys, we don’t got to be ashamed to ask for help.”

The difficulty men often feel in speaking out or asking for help was a theme of the evening.

“There’s no shame — and this is going to the women, too, but especially the men — there’s no shame in healing, there’s no shame in reaching out,” DeGarmo said. “At one time, we weren’t the men to call on, but we are now.”

He noted that before colonization, “There was no shame in our culture, in our values. ... There’s no shame in saying, ‘I want to heal.’ I don’t want to keep carrying this on my shoulders because it’s a lot of weight.”

DeGarmo said he is speaking from experience.

“There was a point in my life where I needed to call for help,” he said. “Everyone around me opened their arms to me. I didn’t think that was possible because of the road I led myself down, the things I’ve done, the things I’ve destroyed.”

Grand Ronde Tribal Police Officer Clint Cardwell told the crowd that, “We are there for everyone.”

“It’s not always easy for me to ask for help when I need it,” he said, noting that can be a hard thing for men generally, let alone when they feel ashamed about the issue. “Anytime you see people in your life that need it, reach out to them.”

Prior to the arrival of European settlers, domestic violence was not a common feature of Indigenous cultures, DeGarmo said.

“A big part of this is acknowledging how impactful colonization has been with domestic violence,” he said.

Tales of broken families causing pain, he said, date back to the violence experienced by families targeted by land-greedy settlers. “One of my relatives remembered one of the last Indian wars,” DeGarmo said.

In one horrific incident, after settlers defeated the men of his relative’s band, DeGarmo said, they forced wives and children to watch as their husbands and fathers were hung.

“It started from there,” he said, as men and women blamed each other for failing to stop the atrocities perpetrated by settlers.

“I spent a majority of my life in survival mode, not acknowledging all the lateral violence that was going on around me. ... Our women sometimes feel they have to wear two hats; be the men and the women for our children,” he said.

Attending a men’s circle, he said, was a healing experience for him. The circles allow men to learn “to heal, to be safe people for (loved ones) to be around.”

As he spoke, his teenage son carried a shell of burning sage throughout the gymnasium, offering each person present the opportunity to smudge themselves with purifying smoke. ■

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