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Maine-Wabanaki REACH

Newsletter
Winter 2014-2015

TRC closing ceremony June 14, 2015

The Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission is entering the last 6 months of their mandate.

With support and guidance from REACH, the Commission has conducted focus groups and gathered statements from Wabanaki and non-Wabanaki people across the State.

Together with document and historical research, the Commission will analyze their data and publish a report of findings and recommendations for best child welfare practice with Wabanaki.

The Commission will host several public events across Maine in the spring, sharing their findings.

The official closing ceremony will be held on June 14, 2015 in the same venue as the Seating Ceremony – Morgan Hill Event Center in Hermon.



The Commission still would like to hear from tribal child welfare workers, youth, Wabanaki people who were in foster care, law enforcement workers, teachers and service providers.

Please contact Rachel George at 664-0280 or Rachel@mainewabanakitrc.org if you are interested in providing a statement.

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Genocide & ME: Shining the Light of Truth

On November 20th, Maria Girouard joined Tom Andrews and Moinque Mutumwinka, presenting to a full house at USM's Hannaford Hall in an event co-sponsored by REACH, the TRC and many others.

Tom, president of United to End Genocide, shared his perspective of confronting genocide as a former congressman from Maine, and talked about what Maine people can do to stop genocide.

Monique, representing the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project, shared her experiences both in Rwanda and in Maine, where she came to escape genocide.

Maria described the strategies and policies of genocide against the Wabanaki tribes, and spoke of the impacts of the resulting intergenerational trauma that has affected centuries of survivors.

Maria shared that this is the time of the great healing that calls each of us to action.

The evening included poetry from Mihku Paul and Penthea Burns, music from the chorus Pihcintu and art work by Falmouth high school students and Robert Shetterly.

We were able to have the entire event audio recorded for podcast and video recorded for us to create educational tools.

REACH Website: www.mainewabanakireach.org
Facebook: MEWabanakiREACH
Twitter: @MEWabanakiREACH

*The path is old in the east
You and I - we have found ourselves
And one another on this well-worn trail
I bow to you and acknowledge all that you hold dear
We each lay down what we've been carrying
And sit in the early morning light
The trees and stones encircle us in prayer
The day has come
~from Ground of Humility by Penthea Burns*

Collaboration with Maine Indian Education

Over the summer, Esther Attean and Maria Girouard met with Superintendent Ron Jenkins and Curriculum Coordinator Beth Clifford to discuss how to facilitate a process to create the tools to incorporate education of history and trauma, resiliency building and healing activities into the school curriculum.

We plan to present to each School Committee, inviting

and recruiting teachers, students, parents and other community members to attend and participate.

We will share information on historical trauma, its impacts and discuss the use of an academic/healing process to increase well-being of students.

Within each School, we would like to identify a few people who would like to

work together over the next year with the goal of developing curriculum materials to be presented back to each School Committee for final approval.

We believe we can work together to turn around the impact of generational trauma seen in American Indian youth having the highest suicide rates and lowest graduation rates.

Intergenerational or historical trauma is defined as increasing emotional and psychological wounding across generations which stems from massive group trauma.

Feelings of grief, emotional distress, depression, anger and anxiety are common in those who experience Intergenerational or historical trauma.

Meeting with Catholic Bishop Deeley

Esther Attean and Maria Girouard joined Carol Wishcamper and Charlotte Bacon of the TRC in a meeting with Bishop Deeley to discuss how the Diocese can engage in this process of truth, healing and change.

The Bishop was very interested in learning more, agreed to help the TRC gather statements from priests who have served in

Wabanaki communities and agreed to receive the Commission's report.

The Commission shared that they have gathered statements from Wabanaki people who have disclosed sexual abuse at the hands of priests.

Bishop Deeley and his staff were responsive and shared information about their reporting process and support services.

REACH talked about intergenerational trauma and its impacts and how acknowledgement of the truth is a necessary step toward healing.

We were pleased with this first meeting and hope to continue conversations with the Bishop about working together for the health and well-being of our communities.

Wabanaki Corrections Organizing

Our team has been busy participating in volunteer orientation at the prisons and juvenile facilities in Maine.

We have had two very productive meetings with Commissioner of Corrections Joe Fitzpatrick and he is very supportive of our work with Wabanaki inmates.

Our focus in the prison is to help inmates build resiliency through educational and healing activities and help staff and clergy understand history, trauma and its impacts.

Although the Commissioner is open to inmates being given the opportunity to provide a statement to the TRC, he wants to ensure the emotional safety of the inmates during and after that process.

Organizers Tom Doyle and Juanita Grant will begin by leading a pilot healing circle for men and women, respectively, at the Maine Correctional Center. We hope to hold more circles and to incorporate education on history, trauma and its impacts.

Tom has also connected with the Directors at both juvenile facilities.

At Long Creek Development Center he presented to and was interviewed by a youth theater group and attended their subsequent performance addressing racism.

At Mountain View Development Center, the Superintendent is eager for his entire staff to participate in training on history, trauma, its impacts and healing activities.

We are also working with the Wabanaki Restorative Justice & Healing Commission to help develop restorative justice processes within the Tribal Courts.



Gathering Centered on Community Wellness

Maria Girouard organized the first ever Wabanaki Wellness Gathering and brought together over 60 people on October 13 & 14, 2014.

The gathering focused on reclaiming our rituals; highlighted Wabanaki expertise; and centered on wellness in our communities.

An overarching theme for the gathering was historical, or intergenerational, trauma and healing.

Dr. Gail Dana-Sacco (Passamaquoddy) delivered a powerful keynote which set us on the track of feeling empowered and motivated to bring about change.

Panel-like discussions during the day included topics such as Wabanaki Sense of Place, Reclaiming our Birth & Death Rituals, Decolonizing our Diets, and Principles of Communication.

Several people attended an evening interactive theatre workshop exploring "truth" led by Vera Francis and morning exercises for "love, justice and liberation" led by Sage Hayes of Justice in the Body.

Other highlights of the gathering included drumming and sharing songs around an evening fire, and eating a variety of nourishing foods.

Follow up discussions will be planned over the winter months focusing further on each of the themes explored at the wellness gathering.

We hope to be able to offer annual wellness gatherings in the future.

"Every time the world changed, we changed - we are survivors, we adapt." - Donald Soctomah

Wabanaki Community Organizing

Wabanaki Community Organizers have been busy helping the TRC gather statements and hold focus groups in our communities; hosting educational events and holding healing circles.

They have provided valuable information to the TRC about the unique needs of tribal

communities by participating in focus groups and individual organizers have provided statements as well.

Kudos to Organizers Krista Stevens and Dena Joseph, who designed and facilitated an art and healing program for Micmac youth.

Two groups of young people, age 5-11 & 12-18, displayed collages and pictures representing "Dreams for Our Community" at celebratory art show at the end of the six week program.

Great Job, women!



Maine Ally Building

REACH's Ally Building work is growing!

Barbara Kates and Susan Howe facilitate monthly Ally Support Groups in Bangor and Portland for people to deepen their understanding of white privilege, Wabanaki-Maine history and actions non-Native Mainers can take to create positive change.

Group discussions have focused on participants'

reflections on readings, experiences and films. Participants are taking actions through writing letters to the editor, engaging in personal conversations about what they are learning, or volunteering at events (Genocide and ME or MLK breakfast).

Tom Reynolds and Arla Patch are coordinating additional trainings in Portland, Bangor and Lewiston for people

interested in becoming an ally and we hope to have new Ally Groups in Lewiston and Houlton by spring. We are creating training and a framework for how organizations can become allies.

Finally, the REACH website will soon include information about these activities and a resource library about privilege, racism, and ally building.

"Although I still love Thanksgiving, it is important to learn what truly happened on those chilly fall days, many years ago. The first Thanksgiving was a peaceful dot in a painting of violence that decimated the native peoples."

~Isaiah Miller
REACH Ally
BDN letter to editor
11/26/14

Evaluation

Thank you to everyone who administered the evaluation survey to Native and non-Native people in your communities and to everyone who has completed a survey.

Ralph Cammack has been busy compiling the data. An initial review of the survey data shows a few trends that we would like to more explore more deeply through the use of focus groups.

The data indicates that there is agreement between Native and non-Native survey respondents that the relationship between Maine and Wabanaki communities could be improved.

The data also shows that fewer resiliency factors are related to respondents reporting generally poorer health.

Both pre- and post-test data indicates that those who acknowledged that taking of Native land, lives and culture has had an impact on Wabanaki communities also acknowledged (at a very high rate) that participating in REACH activities helped their mental, social and spiritual well-being.

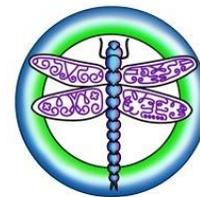
We will be conducting focus groups as part of the overall evaluation of the impact of work done by Maine Wabanaki-REACH and the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process.

We hope that the focus groups can shed deeper insight into the reactions stirred when people reflect on the taking of Wabanaki land, lives and culture.

In focus groups with Wabanaki people we hope to understand how feelings relate to Wabanaki people's sovereignty, health, healing and well-being.

In focus groups with non-Native people, we hope to understand what contributes to people's readiness to become stronger allies with Wabanaki people.

Combined, we hope the feedback from focus groups will provide greater insight into what will build a stronger relationship between Wabanaki and non-Wabanaki Mainers.



Resiliency & Capacity Building Trainings

Purposes: To provide an empowering framework for understanding deep historic wounds while working towards collective healing; to bolster trauma resilience and resolution skills; and to increase the capacity of wellness practitioners in our tribal communities.

Wellness using Capacitar Techniques with Elizabeth King McConnon, M.Ed, Counselor was hosted by the Aroostook Band of Micmacs Community Organizers On October 23, 2014. Capacitar, which means "to empower," teaches simple wellness techniques that lead to immediate healing.

Upcoming trainings

January 20, 2015 – New Moon, New Year, New You - "Bring it On with Chris Trout. Chris is an educator, therapist, mediator, and speaker who writes, speaks, and coaches about the power of perception, how we become resilient, tapping the power of our thoughts and becoming who we really are from a strengths-based focus. (University of Maine, Orono).

Justice in the Body, Sage Hayes will be held in Sipayik and Indian Township

Stigma of Poverty presentation and discussion with Marjorie Withers

Art and Healing workshops with Arla Patch

Writing and Healing workshop with Mihku Paul

Traditional medicines workshop with Maria Girouard will be held at Wabanaki Health and Wellness.

"If we don't treat each other well, how do we have good health?" - Gail Dana-Sacco