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Summer 2021

## Wabanaki REACH Newsletter, Summer 2021

Wabanaki REACH

Maria Girouard

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# Wabanaki REACH

Truth • Healing • Change

Summer 2021

## A Time for Renewal

*from the desk of Maria Girouard, Executive Director*

We hope you are ready to welcome another beautiful Maine summer. We are excited to announce that in appreciation of our valued staff, volunteers, and board, we have decided to declare July a time for respite — a month devoted to self-care.

Many of us have spent countless hours in front of our computers attending back-to-back meetings while fulfilling life's obligations. We know this causes stress that gets trapped in our bodies. The antidote is to take time to unplug, unwind, and just be. After all, if we were supposed to be doing things all the time, we would be called human doings instead of human beings!

During the month of July, Wabanaki REACH won't be holding any events or facilitating any programs. We won't be having any staff meetings, committee meetings, or board meetings. Our projects will take on a slower pace so that we can all catch our collective breaths. Instead, we are encouraging members of our dedicated team to do something special for themselves — visit family, enjoy nature walks, spend time at the lake, the beach, or the garden - anything restorative.

While we cannot ever truly take a break from the work of decolonization, we can shift our focus inward to practice self-reflection. We encourage you, as a member of the Wabanaki REACH community, to spend the July respite learning and sharing — reading articles, blogs, and books; watching documentaries and films; and listening to podcasts. You will find many educational resources on our website.

Don't worry, we won't entirely disappear! We will still be working, but at a more leisurely pace with a focus on wellness. Please reach out to Heather Augustine if you want to schedule a program for August or beyond.



## Welcome to the Team!

As the work of truth, healing, and change continues to grow, so does our incredible team! We are excited to introduce you to our two new Board members Janet Lola and Barbara Kates; our first full-time Administrative Assistant, Jillian Kerr; and Kate Russell, our project coordinator for the new truth-telling initiative focused on the Maine Indian land claims.

**Janet Lola**, Passamaquoddy from Motahkmihkuk, joined the Wabanaki REACH Board last month. She maintains the tribal community garden and food pantry, where she shares her knowledge, skills, and love of growing and sharing food with the community. Janet has a degree in human services, was a member of the group that convened the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission, worked as a Wabanaki Community Organizer, and has helped administer Grandmother's Love, our program dedicated to assisting families in Wabanaki communities with living expenses. Janet is the proud mother of three children, and grandmother of the two children pictured with her at right.



**Barbara Kates** lives in Trenton and Bangor. She comes to the Board after six years working for us as Maine Community Organizer and a year as a volunteer focused on moving our programs online during the pandemic. She is newly retired from her work consulting with non-profits and government agencies in planning and policy development. Barbara has had a diverse career including years working as a dancer, coordinating adult literacy programs, community organizing, and supporting foster parents and grandparents. She loves spending time with family, which includes her husband, children, grandchildren, siblings, nieces and nephews; Barbara also cherishes time walking the dog and working in the garden. Her favorite Wabanaki REACH activities are working on projects with other volunteers and staff, and facilitating programs in Maine communities.

**Jillian Kerr** is a Penobscot Nation tribal citizen who holds a Master of Business Administration degree from Husson University where she worked as a research assistant gathering data for grant reporting purposes, and assisting with grants involving diabetes and opioid addiction in Wabanaki communities. At Penobscot Nation, Jillian has interned at the health center, served as an AmeriCorps volunteer at the Department of Human Services, was a tutor and substitute teacher at Indian Island School, a preschool teacher at the children's center, and a youth counselor at the Boys and Girls Club. "I am excited and honored to work with Wabanaki REACH. I feel it is an opportunity to give back to Native communities and show my appreciation for all that I have been given by my Wabanaki mentors over the years."





**Kate Russell** is a theatremaker and poet who believes storytelling is at the heart of community. She is the Founding Artistic Director of Threadbare Theatre Workshop, and holds a BFA in Theatre Arts from Rutgers, Mason Gross School of the Arts, where her most formative year was spent in residence at Shakespeare’s Globe in London. In 2018, she was invited as a Visiting Artist to Haystack Mountain School of Crafts — soon after, she made Deer Isle *home*. She hopes her work with Wabanaki REACH will serve to illuminate greater truth, healing and joy. “I’m deeply honored and grateful to join such a vital and thoughtful organization as Wabanaki REACH. I look forward to learning, listening, and bearing witness to all the stories longing to be told.” Kate is enamored with every

season in Maine, and can often be found out of doors — gathering wildflowers, shells, firewood, or scraps for poems.

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## Wabanaki Youth Circles

We had a wonderful time in circle via Zoom in May. Six Wabanaki youth met to learn, create community, provide support to one another, have fun, and celebrate being Wabanaki!

Wabanaki REACH Circle Leaders Tyler-Ann Harris (board member) and Heather Augustine (staff) introduced the youth to the MyBestBets curriculum to help the youth think about career pathways and their future.

We were so impressed with their eagerness to share and be open with us and with each other. Whether we were discussing their personal future goals, hearing all about their most recent high school courses, or having show-and-tell, the youth were very engaged. Tyler-Ann shares how this impacted her: “Watching our youth light up when they were talking about their passions and how they hope to use these passions to drive their careers in meaningful ways for their communities gives me so much hope for our next generation of leaders.”

The young people identified topic areas they wanted to explore and we invited Passamaquoddy pipe carrier, elder, and our Wabanaki Wellness Coordinator Brian Altvater to share cultural teachings. The youth learned about and practiced traditional Wabanaki values of generosity, love, and reciprocity with a community service project. They had a modest budget and decided to donate that money to groups that impact their communities.

Heather commented, “I was impressed with their level of self-awareness in the world around them. It gives me hope that not only is our next generation working towards greater futures for themselves and their families, but also towards a world where vulnerable populations will always have a voice.”

Donations were made to the following organizations: Houlton Humane Society, Eastport Memorial Nursing Home, St. Mary’s Catholic Church Food Pantry, Maliseet Tribe Tree Planting Project, and the Wounded Warriors Foundation.

## A Profile of the Artist: James Michael Manley

James Manley is an inmate at the Maine State Prison in Warren. He is also the creator of many strong and beautiful images, which he is pleased to share with the world and gives his permission to show the two presented here.

Born in 1959 and raised in Worcester, Massachusetts, James' father passed down some of the Tribal knowledge and traditions of his Iroquois heritage, but there was not a Native community in Worcester to practice ceremony.

It was during a stint in a Massachusetts prison while he was in his 30s that James turned his hands to artwork. Using the only materials available to him - fallen slate from a roof, a screw, and a fingernail clipper to carve with - he created regalia for a Native circle at the prison. The only paint available to him was white or black, so he would crumble crayons into the white to create additional colors. A legal team presented these regalia as evidence in a lawsuit they won in 2002, granting inmates the right to hold sweat lodge ceremonies.

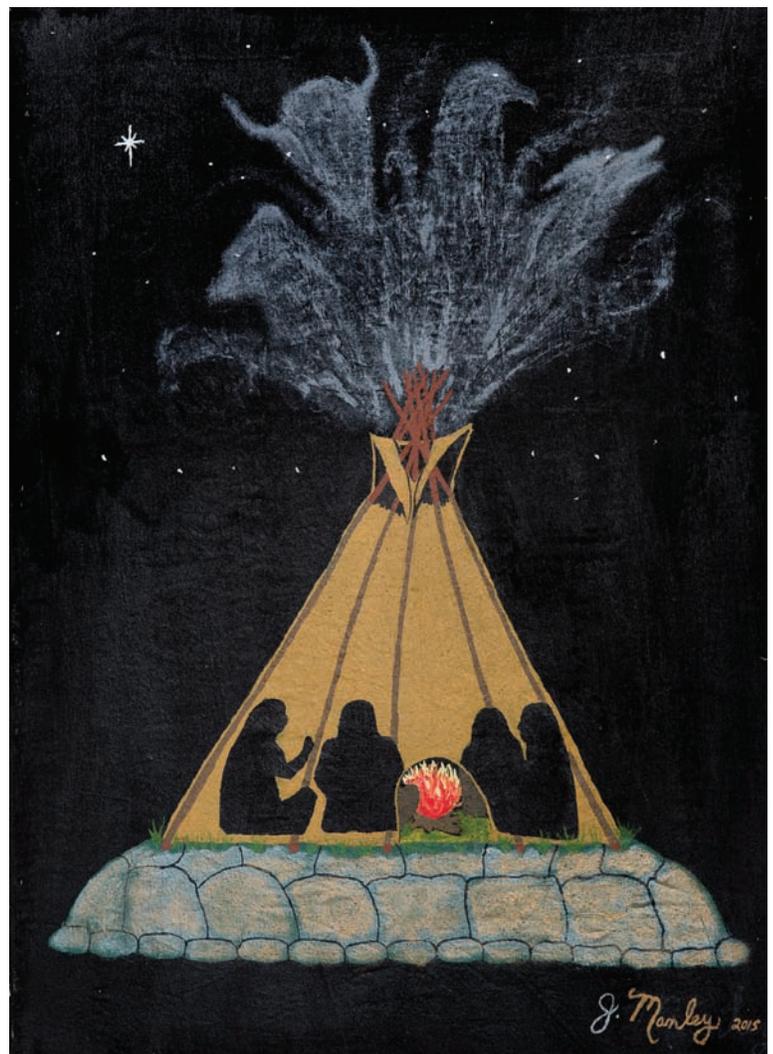
After his release, personal relationships brought him to Brunswick, Maine where he lived for 9 years, doing some pencil drawing in this period. In 2010 he was imprisoned in Maine, where he took advantage of an art class and began painting in 2011. He joined a circle for incarcerated Natives, and created 1 or 2 paintings a week to share with others and enrich the circle experience.

James talked about the impact of the pandemic on his life - how the valuable Wabanaki REACH peace and healing circles led by Roger Paul and Sandra Bassett had to be suspended, and how no sweat lodge ceremonies could be held. He was fully vaccinated in March and looks forward to resuming normal classes and studio time, after 15 months of forced inactivity. The classroom building has been reconfigured and has yet to open, where his painting of Geronimo awaits, only one-quarter finished.

In response to the pandemic, the inmates produced over 250,000 masks. At the end of March the industrial program resumed, and the inmates are back at work on weekdays producing wooden toys, tools like oyster-shuckers for restaurants, boats and cabinetry that are sold in Thomaston. James makes

loon and puffin carvings that become lamps. Working in the shop provides him with spending money.

In normal times, he could spend 2 hours each weekday during recreational period, to join an art class



taught by another inmate. Usually there are 6-8 people in class at a time, and they all contribute suggestions and techniques freely to one another. On weekends, he is sometimes able to enjoy up to eight hours of studio time, working on several canvases simultaneously.

Happily, the Maine State Prison provides paper and canvas, paint, brushes, and colored pencils. James doesn't title his pieces but the two works pictured here were done in 2015 in acrylic which is his favored medium because "oils take too long to dry". The smoke arising from the tipi represents the Four Directions: bear (West), buffalo (North), eagle (East), and coyote (South). Previously he had used bed sheets, backed by plastic boards: "I could make 4-6 paintings out of one sheet," he says.

James has expressed his gratitude to Wabanaki REACH by contributing several pieces of his artwork for our Restorative Justice panels, his images have graced REACH forgiveness cards, and he has sent 10 or 11 paintings to the Indian Island School.

James Manley is living proof that we are so much more than our bad decisions.



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## Mawita'nej Epij'iji — A Wabanaki Community Garden Project

Mawita'nej Epij'iji means "welcome to the gathering place," and soon will become a reality on land donated by the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust.

REACH Community Outreach coordinator Heather Augustine describes this as "a private fruitful edible sanctuary for the local Native community to gather and reconnect to the land. The garden is designed with the kids in mind, with lots of places for hide and seek, houses for the little people, habitat for native pollinators, and of course tons of food."

Ground has already been broken, and Native young people will be getting stipends to plant and steward the land.

~~~~ Woliwon ~~~~ Woliwoni ~~~~ Walalin ~~~~ Thank You ~~~~

Wabanaki REACH is especially grateful for the steady support we have received throughout these challenging times. We have been able to successfully adapt to online learning, and our menu of programs has grown. We have facilitated the following programs in the past months: Interacting with Wabanaki Maine History, Healing Begins with Truth Telling, Decolonizing Conservation Communities, Decolonizing Faith Communities, and Dawnland screenings and panel discussions. Like every other organization, we are discussing ways to safely offer programs in person, but have no definite plans yet. Please stay tuned and visit our Educational Resources page for program descriptions.

*Dear Wabanaki REACH,*

*I participated in your interactive presentation with New Brackett Church on Peaks Island.  
It was the best, most moving experience and education I have ever had via Zoom.  
Thank you for your thoughtfulness, courage, and words.*

*My best to you all,  
Nicole d'Entremont  
Peaks Island*

We sincerely appreciate the following foundations for generously supporting our restorative justice work, truth-telling initiative, and general operations: Silicon Valley Community Foundation (Bia Echo), the Quimby Family Foundation, Maine Initiatives, the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, the Maine Community Foundation, Robert J. Trulasko, Jr. Family Foundation, Gwendolen Elwell Flanagan Foundation, Carita Foundation, Nellie Mae Education Foundation, and The Rocking Moon Foundation. Thank you to the Rockefeller Family Fund for supporting Grandmother's Love. We are grateful for all the individual donors who give once or monthly and who offer to organize their school, work, civic or faith community to host Wabanaki REACH programming. Thank you!



*If you missed an episode of "Dawnland Signals" on WERU-FM, access the archive here:  
<https://archives.weru.org/category/dawnland-signals/>*

*For more information, read our recent blog posts, or make a donation:  
<http://wabanakireach.org>*

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