ASSOCIATION ON AMERICAN INDIAN AFFAIRS
Protecting Sovereignty | Preserving Culture
Educating Youth | Building Capacity
SINCE 1922

2021 Youth Summer Camps

The Association on American Indian Affairs is the oldest non-profit serving Indian Country by protecting sovereignty, preserving culture, educating youth and building capacity. The Association was formed in 1922 to change the destructive path of federal policy from assimilation, termination and allotment, to sovereignty, self-determination and self-sufficiency. Throughout its 99-year history, the Association has provided national advocacy on watershed issues that support sovereignty and culture, while working at a grassroots level with Tribes to support the implementation of programs that affect lives on the ground.

The Association began providing funding grants to Native Youth Summer Camps in 1963 as a powerful way for the Association to achieve its vision, mission and goals. There is significant research that shows when Native youth are connected to their culture, they fare better mentally and emotionally than those who are not. Healthy and strong Native American youth will sustain strong and diverse cultures and protect Native Nation sovereignty for years to come.

The Association provides funding for summer camps that connect Native youth with cultural connections as well as engaging curriculum on health, wellness and self-care. **Between 2003 and 2021, the Association has granted $224,395 to 149 different Native Youth Summer Camps!** This year the Association provided funding for nine summer camps that provided educational opportunities regarding health and wellness, cultural practices and languages. **In total, the 2021 Summer Camps reached at least 1,200 youth from many Native Nations including the Navajo Nation, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Bay Mills Indian Community, Colville, Yakama, Ojibwe, Warm Springs, Makah and Spokane Tribes, Village of Eklutna, Oglala Sioux, Wichita, Crow, Cheyenne River, Caddo, Hopi and Lepan Apache!**

Summer camps this year continued to follow strict safety and social distancing protocols to protect children, Elders and others from the Coronavirus. The Association required that summer camps receiving funding should follow social distancing measures, and educate youth about themselves by using masks, hand washing and social distancing. Despite the continuing challenges that Coronavirus brought, Native youth were still able to learn, connect and have fun while social distancing.
The Dlóó' Yázhí Day Camp operated in-person between June 21 to July 16, 2021 at the Thoreau Community Center in Thoreau, New Mexico. There were 36 youth at the camp, 33 of which were from the Navajo/Diné. Daily activities included cooking, sports, art and nature explorers. Campers learned to make tamales, smoothies, dumplings, fruit kabobs and popsicles. The youth participated in fun physical activities such as archery, basketball, soccer and kickball. The youth connected to Diné culture through playing Navajo bingo and practicing their language skills with Ms. Ellison, a Diné language and culture teacher. In addition to their daily activities, campers embarked on an overnight trip to Bluewater Lake State Park where they enjoyed lots of fishing and nature walks.

The highlight of camp was the community mural that the youth painted with Marina Eskeets, a talented Diné artist. Marina interviewed the campers about their communities and used their responses to form the vision for the mural. Over the course of two weeks, Marina and the campers painted the mural on the side of the community center. On the last day of camp, families and the community joined the campers to celebrate the completion of the mural.
The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians’ Circle of Life Program ran both in-person and online from June until August 2021 across Northern Michigan and Northern Wisconsin. The program included 884 youth from the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and the Bay Mills Indian Community. Circle of Life focused on teachings related to the Medicine Wheel and the 7 Grandfather Teachings. The 7 Grandfather Teachings include Love, Respect, Bravery, Truth, Honesty, Humility and Wisdom. To encourage intergenerational learning and bonding, Elders spent time with the youth through coffee gatherings. While meeting with youth over coffee, the Elders shared stories, taught language and discussed the 7 Grandfather Teachings.

Circle of life put a focus on health and wellness through educational and physical activities. Students learned to track their steps and physical activity with pedometers. They also participated in educational activities like partnering with the Community Health Program to prepare at home meal kits and visiting local farmers to learn more about water, tending to land and harvesting food. The camp guided youth through creative self-care activities like art and painting. In addition, the camp teamed up with their Prevention Specialist to provide education on mental health awareness and topics specific to Native American youth.
For the month of August, The Young Warrior Society held an in-person day camp for 47 members from the Colville, Yakama, Ojibwe, Warm Springs, Makah and Spokane Tribes. Campers gathered a wide diversity of food, all of which was shared back to their community. Food was made as gifts to give to Elders in the community, homes of those sick with COVID, fire fighters who battled the wrath of wild land fires and ceremonies such as funerals. Campers collected different natural foods like high mountain huckleberries, low valley herbs and wild rice from the Great Lakes region. They also fished for eel and salmon from the Columbia River. Families were given opportunities to learn how to preserve foods without the use of sugars to create awareness of the sugar content of foods. They also learned to use alternatives to sugar with precaution to diabetes.

The Young Warrior Society also hosted a food-gathering workshop in Nespelem, Washington on August 7th, 2021 for 25 attendees along with 4 Native Elders, 10 youth and two traditional Indigenous food experts. The gathering discussed food safety, traditional food teachings and Indigenous wisdom of health benefits of foods and plants. In sacred ways, the gathering represented prayers and generosity in relation to health and wellness to encourage participants toward food sovereignty. The Elders in attendance also helped youth connect to their culture by showing traditional practices and methods of protocols around foods.
The **American Indian Child Resource Center** held summer camp for elementary age students from July 12 to July 16, 2021. Because of California safety restrictions regarding the coronavirus, the Camp was not able to meet in its traditional form. The American Indian Child Resource Center abided by these restrictions to assure the health and safety of the youth, adults and Elders. Moving activities outside with social distancing, the camp hosted about 4 students daily at the American Indian Resource Center in Oakland, California. It focused on wellness and self-care by cooking, gardening and facilitating talking circles. The campers engaged in physical activity through hikes and games while exercising their creativity through Native American crafts.

The American Indian Child Resource Center is planning on continuing these activities and outdoor gatherings for youth in the Fall through a weekend camping trip where students will learn about traditional Native agrarian practices and organic farming. They will also further their learning about gardening and will learn from a Native Elder about acorn harvesting.
The 2021 **Native Village of Eklutna Culture Camp** hosted 51 youth, adults and Elders from August 1 to August 6, 2021 at the Native Village of Eklutna’s Pow Wow grounds. The camp focused on camping and fishing in addition to having cultural activities. Participants learned how to make a fishing spear, cast out a net and clean the fish that were caught. Campers cast out the fishing net and caught 8 fish throughout the time at camp! After cleaning and cutting the fish, they grilled them up for a nutritious lunch the next day.

The Camp also hosted multiple activities including nature walks, language lessons and the main event – cache making with Elders. The cache took two days to make and is now housed at a Native building in the village. While on nature walks, attendees learned how to identify animal tracks and diverse berries. Campers had the pleasure of connecting to their culture through learning the Dena’ina language and practicing it through storytelling and songs.
The Woitan Wicatuwitapi Pride Gathering was a daylong camp held from June 26-June 27, 2021 on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in Porcupine, South Dakota. The 25 youth who took part in the gathering represented the Oglala Sioux, Wichita, Crow, Cheyenne River, Diné, Caddo, Hopi and the Lepan Apache tribes. The camp focused on building a positive identity and supporting LGBTQ2S+ youth. The Gathering started with erecting a tipi while teaching a corresponding lesson of how Lakota values are represented by each pole. The campers learned about values such as Waunsila (compassion), Wahwala (humility), Wacantognaka (generosity), Woohitika (bravery), Waohola (respect and honor), Woksape (wisdom) and Wowacintanka (fortitude).

The gathering hosted a variety of sessions including traditional Lakota teachings regarding the unique roles and responsibilities of LGBTQ2S+ individuals within Lakota society. They also learned about LGBTQ+ history, self-care, contemporary issues in society and a first-person experience of life as an Indigenous trans man. Youth were guided to self-care through making medicine tool kits and learning to harvest medicines.
The **Bundle Carrier’s Camp** was held from July 11 to July 16, 2021 and July 19 to July 20, 2021 in Toka Bay, South Dakota. The Camp focused on both mental and physical health and wellness by learning coping mechanisms through meditation activities and art therapy. Other strength-based activities and discussions focused on environmental science, astronomy and being good stewards to land. Each day consisted of nature walks, writing poems in the Dakota language and journaling. Campers would end each day by participating in a cultural activity such as: hand games, Dakota storytelling, wrap stitch beading or watching Indigenous movies.

Camp lessons included teaching youth healthy eating substitute options that they could do at home using their own tools, food and budget. Campers also learned the different methods of water testing which included identifying different pollutants to look for and how water relates to plants, animals and people.

A highlight from camp was the day trip to Granite Falls to visit the Makoce Ikikcupi Dakota Village, Zani Otunwe. The village is a self-sustainable, off the grid, green village. The kids learned how to make earth lodges, plant fruit and nut trees and eradicate invasive weeds that are not native to the area. Youth also enjoyed presentations about Dakota Constellations, which included the Dakota narrative of the stars and seasons. The Makoce Ikikcupi people were very moved to have the opportunity to present their village to a group of youth that were eager to learn more about the village and culture.
NATIVE’s 6-day overnight camp hosted 15 youth from August 10 to August 15th, 2021. Campers got to harvest plants from the forest and beach to serve as part of their everyday meals. They fished for salmon with a beach seine and learned to hunt for deer. The children were excited to learn how to process, smoke and preserve the deer or salmon that were caught. Additionally, they got to take some home to share with family and Elders. The camp educated youth about sugar, how sugar is processed in the body and the difference between natural and unnatural sugars to be able to build physical wellness.
**Huslia Tribal Council Camp**

**Huslia Tribal Council** - Tanana Chiefs Conference - in Fairbanks, Alaska held summer camp for youth from July 16 to July 25, 2021. The 10-day overnight camp focused on health and wellness practices through teaching coping skills, mental health awareness and how to overcome bullying. The youth participated in self-care activities like yoga and learned to care for their health through tobacco prevention. The youth were excitedly learned how to fish, camp and live with the land. The camp prioritized teaching youth about culture and traditional values in every aspect of camp. Youth got to actively connect their culture by participating in Native singing, dancing and language lessons. They also were able to seek wisdom from Elders through talking circles.
The Association’s 2021 Summer Camp Program Awardee stories are included in this Report and provide a sample of the minimum we can do for Native youth. But we can do even more.

Currently, the majority of the summer camp program is funded through a single donor: the Ben Plucknett Charitable Trust. The grant program is also funded by Association’s unrestricted operating funds, which come from general giving.

The Association sees a demonstrated need to develop a consistent national program throughout Indian Country that will address self-advocacy and build the Native youth voice. A national summer camp program will also help youth develop leadership skills that will support Tribal sovereignty and self-determination while fulfilling the Association’s vision of creating a world where Native American cultures are lived, protected and respected. If you would like to participate in the development of this national opportunity, please contact the Association!

Help the Association build a National Youth Camp that is available consistently every summer to Native youth in regions across Indian Country. Curriculum is currently being developed that will provide education through diverse cultural teachings that include:

- Self-care and self-advocacy so that Native youth are not taken advantage of.
- Suicide prevention so that Native youth have a network of support and ways to seek help.
- Health and wellness to stay strong and brave.
- American Indian History and the U.S.-Tribal government-to government relationship to understand what Tribes need to grow and provide for their peoples.
- Develop political leadership and advocacy to support sovereignty, self-determination, and protection of cultures.

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PARTNER WITH US TO SUPPORT A NATIONAL NETWORK OF NATIVE YOUTH ADVOCACY AND SELF-DETERMINATION
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