

Creating a Healthy Yaqui Community

Sarah Janelle Phillips

Drug and Alcohol Addiction

Throughout my life on the Pascua Yaqui reservation in Tucson, Arizona, I've witnessed many hardships. One problem is that many people struggle with addiction to drugs and alcohol. According to the National Institutes of Health, Native American youth have the highest rates of alcohol use disorders compared to other races. For illegal drug use, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health shows that in 2013, 12.3 percent of Native Americans used drugs, the highest of all races in the United States.

A Program that Cares

I go to the New Beginnings Clinic, a medication assisted treatment (MAT) clinic located on the Pascua Yaqui reservation. I receive treatment for a drug problem. The program is fully staffed with doctors specifically trained in addiction and mental health. They approach each situation in a way

members can appreciate. They hold groups each day and extend services in all areas you might need if you are dealing with a mental health diagnosis.

The people here really care. If they don't hear from you, they'll call you and even show up at your house to make sure you're doing well.

They make sure to get the family involved because family is really important in Yaqui culture.



Native Traditions at the Center

Also, the program values Native traditions. For example, you are allowed to be excused if you have to go to a ceremony. The program brings in speakers from the Yaqui community to teach about natural and traditional healing methods. Native healers from Mexico do one-on-one sessions. The program provides sweat lodges, which involve a traditional Native American purification ceremony. Many clients, myself included, like the holistic approach to addiction treatment.

I notice that many people who go to New Beginnings are over the age of 35. It strikes me that if we, as a tribe, could have done something for these people at a younger age, then maybe they wouldn't be where they are today. However, one thing I know about our people and culture is that there is nothing we cannot overcome together.

Our tribe is extremely committed to provid-



The Pascua Yaqui tribe of the United States is descended from the Yaqui people of Mexico.

ing assistance to us when we need it. Tribal programs provide ongoing support for us to reach our goals, and for many of us, that includes sobriety. We have programs that are culturally sensitive, and that alone provides a lot of comfort. We have a Men's Path program, which is an all-male recovery home. We are also developing a Women's Path program for women and mothers who need

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support obtaining and maintaining sobriety.

Outside of the reservation, we do not get that same treatment, as non-Natives may not understand why

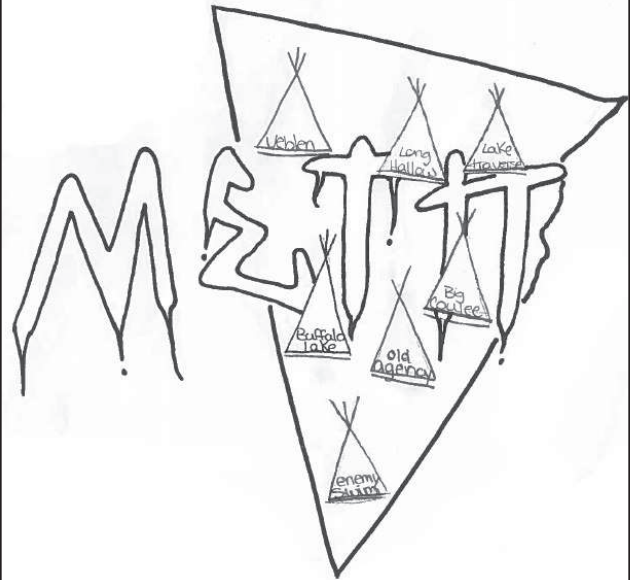
we think or act a certain way. The healing practices put a strong emphasis on Pascua Yaqui culture. I can say with utmost pride that I am proud and honored to be a part of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. We stand with dignity and compassion. The care and the concern we have for our community is never ending. I constantly hear of new programs and services focused on us growing together. We like to say, "I heal, we heal, the community heals." For me, every day is a great day to be Indigenous.

Sources: <www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/05/18/south-dakota-indian-liquor-alcoholism-column/101484586>; <sunrisehouse.com/addiction-demographics/native-americans>

Sarah Phillips is a multiracial female and an enrolled member of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe in Tucson, Arizona. She is 26 years old, a mother of 3, and a student at the Pascua Yaqui Tribe Adult Education Program. After she gets her GED, she would like to attend college and pursue a degree in criminal justice.

A Problem in our Community

Alicia Ellingson



Alicia Ellingson is from Old Agency, one of the communities in the Lake Traverse Reservation (pictured above) in South Dakota. She created this image of her reservation to show how crystal meth has penetrated her community. She writes, "As a recovering addict, I would love to share my story about how I am recovering in the hopes that others realize that life without crystal meth is possible."

Getting Well

According to the author, what works well about the treatment program that she attends?

Infer what the author means when she says, "If we, as a tribe, could have done something for these people at a younger age, then maybe they wouldn't be here today."

In your experience, what works well for people who are trying to recover from addiction?