



Systems Building and Early Care in a Rural Native American Community

by Kim Nall

On November 23, 1941 the Constitution and By-laws for the Cachil Dehe Band of Wintun Indians of the Colusa Indian Community were ratified and adopted by the Tribe's original 45 members. At the time of ratification, the Colusa Indian Community resided in the heart of Northern California's agricultural land on an 80-acre reservation. This original site stretched along the bountiful Sacramento River, about four miles north of the Colusa city limits. Two years later the Tribe's land increased an additional 210 acres, just one mile south of the original reserva-

tion. It is at this location where the current Colusa Casino and Cachil Dehe Village Complex stand today. It is from these beginnings that the Colusa Indian Community has grown and prospered to its current 84 members.

put into preserving their history is also mirrored throughout the community and one of its main priorities over the years has been developing educational supports. Investing in the future and setting a strong foundation for their youth is a priority for the community.

There is much to be grateful for within the Colusa Indian Community. The same pride and determination that was

In 2003, the Colusa Indian Community Council grew their dream to provide

Preserving Colusa Culture

The Colusa Indian Community strongly believes in preserving their past to help pave their future. In 1969, several tribal members began the spiritual journey of building a traditional roundhouse to honor the Creator. At the time, resources were scarce and members used what they had from the surrounding area: chicken wire, willow poles, and most importantly, the center pole, harvested from a tree across the Sacramento River. With steady determination, the roundhouse finally received its roof two years later. In 1993, tribal funding allowed for the purchase of some modern materials. With tribal members working side-by-side, the roundhouse was brought to the current condition as it stands today.

There is much to be grateful for within the Colusa Indian Community. Pride and determination are evident throughout the community, and one of its main priorities over the years has been developing educational supports. Although the publication of this book was an initial step towards the restoration of their native language, this project and others are still in their infancy and will continue to expand to include additional words on CD and DVD tutorials for all members to use.



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Start-Child Care Partnership programs, as well as the entire center. Kim also develops community partnerships, engages diverse partners, works with families and community leaders to implement Policy Council guidance, and demonstrates a commitment to early childhood best practices and innovation. She was formerly Co-Owner and Co-Director of Kids Country Preschool. Kim is a graduate of California State University-Sacramento. Her professional affiliations include National Indian Child Care Association (NICCA: www.nicca.us), National Farm to School Network, Peer Learning and Leadership Network (PLLN), Tribal Child Care Association of California (TCCAC), Tribal Early Childhood Research Center Steering Committee, and Global Leaders of the World Forum Foundation Steering Committee.

and expand the establishment for early care and education in the community. CICC opened an early learning and child care center as a way to provide a prospect for integration with the public school systems, in hopes of breaking down barriers between the children in the tribal community and the larger community and public schools. This was an identified need for the overall social and emotional well being of their children and successful transition to public school. The council envisioned a strong early learning foundation, parenting supports, programs that address the needs of the community to provide extensions from home to school, facilities for working parents and students, and early care and education for their children.

The Colusa Indian Community's Hand-in-Hand Early Learning Center opened its doors in June 2003. The center currently provides early care and education for children ages 12 months to 12-years-old.

Hand-in-Hand is a Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Tribal Grantee, which is a federal block grant through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) that provides child care funds to support eligible families attending tribal child care programs. Along with these federal funds, they also receive funds from the California Department of Education (CDE) through the Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership (EHS–CCP), for which Colusa Indian Community was the first Tribe to partner with CDE on this initiative in 2015. The EHS–CCP has reinforced Colusa Indian Community Council, Hand-in-Hand Early Learning Center in their efforts to undertake a major remodel and expansion of their infant and toddler programs to provide layered funding for high-quality infant/toddler care in the community. The Tribe has invested in the Center with resources, funding,

and the establishment of a collaborative approach to services within the community for families, which provides a coordinated effort and ways to communicate with families in support of early care and education, and extended child care needs.

Family and Community: Essential Partners in Success

Family and community engagement is at the core of the vision of the Tribe and Hand-in-Hand. Through the investment in early care and education and the expansion of partnerships within the community with tribal, county, state, and national collaboration, Hand-in-Hand Early Learning Center has made its mark as a respected and innovative program. Relationship building is a key factor in providing optimal services to the community and families. Investing in a highly motivated and qualified teaching team is also a major objective in a high-quality child care experience.

Finding and retaining qualified teachers can be a barrier in rural locations. Colusa Indian Community Council has approached the challenges by providing a competitive compensation package, specialized training, on-site technical assistance, and a beautiful environment to work in. They have built a solid team of teachers and early childhood educators who are committed to the children, families, and Colusa Indian Community. The center director has been at Hand-in-Hand Early Learning Center from the very beginning stages, even before the center opened its doors, and so have the center cook and bus driver, as well as some of the teachers. The bond and commitment of the team is clearly an indication of the quality of the center.

Throughout the journey, Hand-in-Hand's teaching team has embraced many initiatives to support the goals

of the community. Hand-in-Hand was recognized in 2012 for Michelle's Obama's "Let's Move! Initiative," for its efforts to provide prevention and early intervention for childhood obesity. Hand-in-Hand has had a school garden and garden curriculum for many years. The children at the center help to plan, plant, care for, and harvest the garden produce, embracing the garden-to-plate and farm-to-school approach to healthy meals. The garden is a center-wide effort and is central to the wellness policy that Hand-in-Hand has implemented. Physical activity promotion, wellness, and nutrition are all essential in the overall objectives of Hand-in-Hand's philosophy.

The center has also embraced the philosophy of connecting children with nature in new and wonderful ways. The center director's experience as a World Forum Foundation Global Leader in 2011 introduced the Colusa Community to International Mud Day, as well as other nature curriculum discoveries. The center's teaching team utilizes observation to lead their outdoor extensions and children learn through their everyday play in their natural environment. Exploring the world together — and observing children's discoveries — leads the teachers to find new ways to expand and engage within the supportive environment.

Hand-in-Hand also strives to create a well-rounded curriculum that looks at young children and their families individually, providing a shared approach to the families' experiences at Hand-in-Hand. Meeting families' specific needs in as seamless a manner as possible is their goal. Their dedicated staff looks at the strengths of each child and family, and builds upon those in partnership, in order to keep the family at the center of the child's early education and overall daily experiences. When there is an obstacle to meeting the needs of a child or family, the center works with the



community and departments within the community, as well as the elected officials of the Tribe, the Executive Committee — to ensure that all avenues of support are carefully assessed for each child and family. There are times when families may feel their needs are not met; when this happens, they recognize the need to realign practices and find ways to support and hear each individual family. Working with families is a commitment to the children and their future and the teaching team recognizes the need to have continuous improvements in order to meet families where they are.

With regards to services provided within the tribal community, there is a wealth of resources within the Tribe providing quality services to their community. When there is an identified gap in services, Hand-in-Hand has developed numerous relationships to support the children in the center. Whether it is by sharing training with the County Office of Education or other Early Head Start-Child Care Partner grantees, the center has been effective at bringing resources to its rural location. The coordination with agencies such as dental or health

services and special education and curriculum enhancement specialists also allows the center to provide auxil-

ary provisions for children and families.

Strong relationships and collaborative services within the tribal community have led to a deepening of resources and knowledge base within the Hand-in-Hand- Early Learning Center family. Being an integral part of the overall wellness of children, and the ability to be a highly motivated and high-quality program, is an exciting and continuous effort. Looking at the future of the tribal community, we will continue to find ways to enhance and enrich the lives of children, through skilled teachers, engaged leadership, and continued partnership and relationship building. Together, these opportunities create an exciting panorama.



Resources

www.letsmove.gov/blog/2011/05/03/colusa-indian-community-goes-hand-hand-healthy-lifestyles

www.colusa-nsn.gov

<https://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/links/hand-in-hand-learning-center-still-moving/>

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