

# JOURNEYS IN CREATIVITY: *A Traditional Native Arts Youth Camp*

## DID YOU KNOW . . .

- 56% of Native students graduate from high school, while 44% do not.\*
- 17% of American Indian students are able to continue their education, while 60% of all U.S. students go on to college or other higher technical training.\*\*
- Most Native students do not have a college graduate in their family; many do not have a family member who has graduated from high school.\*\*
- High rates of poverty and unemployment create a sense of loss and despair, often very difficult for students to overcome, particularly when their families need their financial contribution as employed minors to subsist.
- In 2015 the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics stated, "suicide among Native youth is a crisis."

Capturing the attention of high school students in the digital era can be a challenge, but Shirod Younker (Coquille), *Journeys in Creativity* program director and a 2017 NACF Mentor Artist Fellow, has been successfully attracting emerging artists for over a decade. Through the use of arts-focused workshops, his mentor team addresses the educational and cultural barriers urban and rural Native youth often face when evaluating whether higher education and technical training are meaningful or attainable.

Although this series shares similarities with other college-preparatory camps and summer courses, the execution of these workshops is unique. The program's foundation is built on the Native concept of "meaning-making." Each session focuses on the pertinent cultural values that best suit the specific art form, and in the process students become more connected to their native culture. The lessons become ethnic identifiers that each student can draw on in developing their identity, and psychological attachment, to his or her own heritage. As the practice of the art builds and strengthens the students' sense of community, the students' cultural connection is strengthened as well.



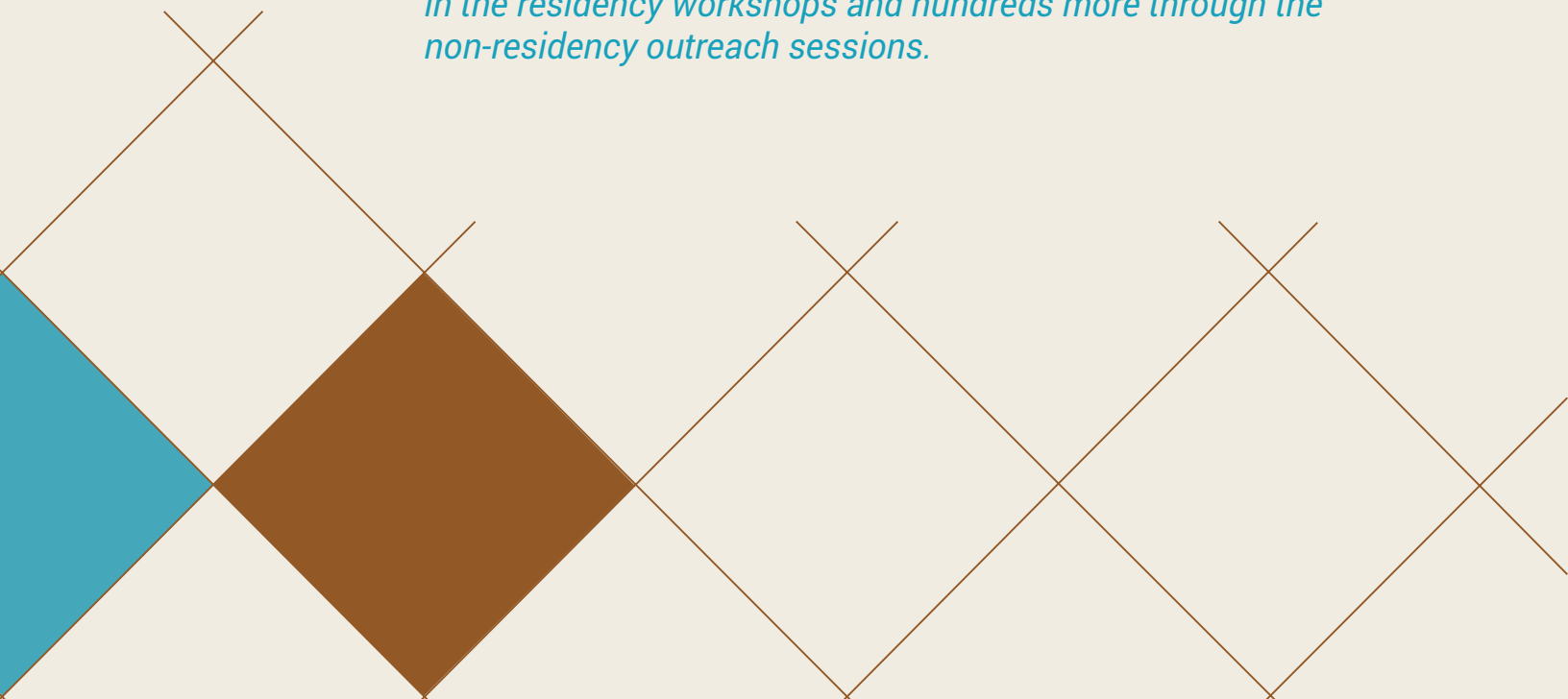
Though their “journeys” are steeped in traditional arts practices, the participants develop 21st century skills and learn to incorporate and experience contemporary mediums and methods within those traditional practices. Offerings such as, *“Catching Our Own Shadows: An Introduction into Photography”*, *“Weaving Images: Basketry + Silkscreen”*, *“Shattering Stereotypes: The Confluence of Indigenous Art & Glass”*, *“Art of the Canoe”*, *“Fiber, Shell, Stone Bone: Intro to Working with Natural materials,”* and *“Traditions in Metal”*, expand exposure for the participants as they break down stereotypes and deliver a unique educational and life experience. As this photo of director Younker’s paddles suggests, these mentors are masters in their art forms.



As Journeys’ artists and elders mentor these students and present important elements of Native culture, students are immersed in an environment that incorporates other healthy living practices. They learn respect for the natural world, recognition of the critical importance of community and the dual values of hard work and usefulness.

The Journeys in Creativity program helps teens overcome barriers that many Native American children face in the current educational system. Having such a positive experience encourages them to stay in school and encourages them to pursue higher training and education. The workshops are programmed to highlight the students’ strengths, recognize their cultural resiliency and stimulate their confidence through their own creativity. The cultural aspects of the workshops are also structured to benefit the students by creating a powerful bond with the participants’ families to encourage support at home should they choose to pursue higher education.

*Since 2004, 175 Native high school students have participated in the residency workshops and hundreds more through the non-residency outreach sessions.*



## OUTCOMES

Efficacy of this program can be measured in many ways, but a past participant's story better demonstrates its potential. While attending the Oregon College of Art and Craft (OCAC), Carmen Salem (Yakama/Comanche) participated in three two-week Journeys in Creativity residencies. She recently earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Institute of American Indians Arts, the only multi-tribal center of higher education in the United States dedicated solely to the preservation, study, creative application and contemporary expression of Native American arts and culture. On May 19th she will reach another milestone with her first solo exhibit as a multi-disciplinary artist (printmaking and painting) at the Artifact in Santa Fe, New Mexico. When asked about the impact the Journeys in Creativity program had on her life, she provided some interesting feedback.

*"When I enrolled in my first Journeys residency, I was interested in art but was thinking more about going into a career in law enforcement. After a couple weeks of immersion in a place with other aspiring artists, receiving mentoring by Native instructors and learning what skills would be necessary for a successful arts practice, I wasn't confused anymore. The experience was powerful and certainly unique, but perhaps the most important impact on me personally is that those artist instructors have remained my mentors."*

~ Carmen Salem (Yakama/Comanche)

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

**Sessions** vary from day sessions to two-week residency programs.

**Residency sessions** are generally held during school breaks and over summer with the two-day and three-day urban and rural outreach sessions held around the State of Oregon throughout the year.

All programs are **limited to a maximum of 12 students**. This high ratio of artist-mentors-to-student-apprentices is intentional and remains critical to the program, as the most successful outcomes are generally derived through the individual attention and guidance each student artist receives.

**Journeys in Creativity workshops are offered free of charge to Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native and American Indian youth.**



*Journeys in Creativity* is open to Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native and American Indian youth.

The **Native Arts and Cultures Foundation** is honored to be an active fiscal sponsor of this program.

**For more information please contact;**  
Elizabeth Madrigal  
(360) 334-7260  
[elizabeth@nativeartsandcultures.org](mailto:elizabeth@nativeartsandcultures.org)

\*Source: "The Native American Community in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile", A partnership between Coalition of Communities of Color + Portland State University

\*\* Source: "Graduation Rates & American Indian Education", Partnership with Native Americans, May 16, 2017

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