



Elder Visions

Newsletter of the National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.

Holiday 2002

Conference 2002 Special Report

Healing our Spirits draws 1,300 elders

This past September in Albuquerque, New Mexico, individuals from all over the world joined 1,302 American Indian elders in a celebration of spirit, health, and healing. Downtown Albuquerque became, for one week, a melting pot of cultures as different as Maori from New Zealand, Canadian, Central and South American, American Indian, and Alaska Native.

Many groups of elders attended both the National Indian Health Board's (NIHB) "Healing Our Spirits Worldwide," and NICOA's "Healing Ourselves, Healing Our Spirits, Healing Our People" conferences. The two events provided opportunities to learn that although Native people may be from different places, their triumphs and tragedies are similar. The conference(s) showed that Native people worldwide suffer

many of the same problems, such as alcoholism, elder abuse, gang violence, and drug addiction.

According to NICOA project manager Heather Mann, "We also learned that we are strong, that we are all a part of one another, and that we must bridge the great distances that separate us spiritually and across this earth, and we must come together to heal." Throughout the week, elders were able to attend presentations ranging from discussions on sobriety to traditional healing for the world. A team from Alkali Lake, a Canadian Native community, moved the audience of more than 2,000 with an emotional presentation of their 20-year battle against alcoholism.

Verizon executive Link Hoewing gave a presentation about the need for communication centers in rural areas so that elders could have much needed access to education opportunities, and other help that they generally do not receive on reservations.

NICOA's next conference, scheduled for 2004, has already drawn bids from Milwaukee, Wisc. and Tulsa, Okla. The site of the next conference will be determined by NICOA's board.



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NICOA Featured Employee

Candi Terry

Born in Altus and raised in Frederick, Oklahoma, Candi Terry began her accounting career at the age of 16. She began working at NICOA just seven months ago, following a



chance relocation to Albuquerque with her husband, Nathan. A fitness trainer, she believes that being physically fit helps her manage the stress that comes with her role in NICOA's finance department. Candi actively participates in many different types of sports, is a certified aerobics instructor, and loves to draw and paint. Her positive

outlook and strong work ethic at NICOA come from lessons she learned as a young girl from her mother. "My mother taught me to never give up on anything you really believe in. She started out as a janitor at a bank where I grew up and she's now the vice president of that same bank. She taught me to always stick with it if you think something is worth the effort."

Though she came to Albuquerque and then to NICOA by chance, Candi truly believes that she has landed in the right place. "It has really benefited me to work with NICOA. It feels good to be a part of a bright and positive future for the organization, and those it serves."

NICOA tackles environmental health

A November Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) news release announced a new NICOA project:

"A cooperative agreement has been reached with the National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) to conduct a national assessment of environmental and health risks among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The Agency awarded NICOA \$85,000 to complete the project. The

objective of the project is to improve health of all American Indians and Alaska Natives. A previous study indicated that American Indian elders experience 44 percent more asthma attacks than the general aging population. The circumstances which trigger asthmatic attacks will be assessed in one in a series of publications intended to increase awareness of environmental hazards common among American Indians and Alaskan Natives. Recommendations will be made on ways to address those hazards"

Meeting the challenges of federal benefits

NICOA is working with a first-ever inter-agency agreement to design, develop, and conduct a series of demonstrations that bring information to American Indian and Alaska Native elders about the full range of Social Security Act benefit programs. The Social Security Administration, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Indian Health Service joined together for the first time ever to address the benefit needs of Indian elders. NICOA was asked to develop a program of education and outreach and to present that program in Indian Country.

NICOA contributed many years of its experience with Indian elders to know and understand their needs, their wishes and the gaps in providing good information about Social Security benefits. The program was first developed by Rebecca Baca and her Elder Voices staff. She based the design on what we call the NICOA model. This model leans heavily on community advice and consultation from our elders, language and graphics that recognize and respect elders' traditional ways and messengers who have earned the trust of elders and disabled members of each community.

Elder abuse project needs reader input

NICOA's ongoing project to look at "best case" programs for elder abuse prevention/treatment needs input from readers. We would like to learn your thoughts about 1) what needs to be done at national and tribal levels; and 2) tribal or community programs that are having some success in dealing with this important issue. The NICOA abuse project, funded by the National Assn. of State Units on Aging (NASUA), will continue through the spring of 2003. Please contact NICOA (see info on page 2) if you can help.

New Mexico site sees development of new products for elders

The first site for the development of the NICOA education and outreach program included six Pueblos in the Albuquerque area. Several others were added informally to the first effort. Elder Voices produced several important products that continue to be adapted and improved as new demonstration sites are chosen.

Among the products are a simple language presentation of the basic eligibility criteria for Social Security Retirement and Survivor's Benefits, Disability and Supplemental Security Income Benefits, Medicare, Medicaid and the state buy-in programs for those who are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid. Another valuable product is a screening form that steers a health or social services worker through a series of questions whose answers might point to benefit eligibility for the elder being screened. This screening is only done if the elder agrees and is confidential.

Minnesota and Montana sites focus on training the trainer

The demonstration moved to northern Minnesota for its second site. NICOA worked with the Red Lake and Leech Lake Reservations in the Bemidji area. Board member Helen Cummings was an active, valued member of the NICOA team in Minnesota.

The federal partners asked for some changes in the approach and NICOA suggested several changes as well. NICOA organized a training program for volunteer workers in the basics of all the Social Security benefits programs. This training program proved to be very popular. Sixty people came from the two sponsoring reservations plus others from White Earth and Fond du Lac.

Federal benefits project expands to Seattle

Continued

NICOA hired onsite coordinators at both Red Lake and Leech Lake to help with gathering community advice, advising on the design of the training and outreach programs, and making all the many arrangements for special outreach events. Joyce Lyons, an elder of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, is NICOA's Leech Lake representative. Jenny Hollis, MSW and director of Red Lake's mental health counseling program, is the Red Lake coordinator. NICOA Nurse Consultant Jean Fleury developed and presented a cultural sensitivity training program for two northern Minnesota Social Security field offices. Jean's presentation covered the history of tribal-U.S. relations plus local tribal issues and experiences.

In July, an outreach program focusing on disability benefits was held in Browning for the Blackfeet Reservation. The success of that project led the Social Security Administration to expand to Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy. The federal partners asked NICOA to add its train-the-trainer program to an August meeting in Havre. This training program was the same as the one in Bemidji. The project drew 29 registrants from five tribes.

Course evaluations from both Minnesota and Montana were overwhelmingly positive. The only negative remarks concerned the need for this type of training more often and for every Indian community. NICOA received very high marks for its efforts and even made the evening news in Bemidji.

Project moves to urban Seattle

NICOA is very excited about a new direction for the education and outreach demonstrations. NICOA persuaded the federal partners to develop a model for the urban population. There are many elderly and disabled Indians in American cities who have very few resources available to them. Their needs are great.

NICOA and the federal partners have chosen Seattle as the site for the urban outreach version of the program. Now in its early design and proposal phase, the project being developed in close cooperation with the Seattle Indian Health Board. The urban project began in the late fall of 2002. NICOA's well-received training programs form the core of the urban model.

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NICOA Membership Application

Complete form and mail to: **NICOA Membership**
10501 Montgomery Blvd. NE, Suite 210
Albuquerque, NM 87111

NAME (Please Print): _____

Address: _____

City/State/

Zip: _____

MEMBERSHIP TYPE: (PLEASE CHECK ONE)

VOTING MEMBER (\$10): Qualified voting members are any Indian 55 years of age or older who is an enrolled "member of an Indian tribe, band or combination of tribes and bands, recognized by the United States Department of the Interior."

Please attach a copy of proof of enrollment. Fill out the following if a copy is not available.

I hereby attest that (print name) _____ is a member of the (tribe) _____ of (state) _____.

Enrollment # _____ Date of Birth ____/____/____

Certified by _____ Title _____

ASSOCIATE MEMBER (\$40): Any Indian under age 55, or non-Indian individual may become a non-voting associate member of NICOA upon payment of dues.

ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBER (\$100): Any organization (including tribes) may become a non-voting organizational member of NICOA upon payment of dues.

PAYMENT ENCLOSED: Check # _____ Money Order # _____ P.O.# _____

In addition to my membership, please include a tax-deductible donation for: _____

From all of us at NICOA . . .



Have a happy, healthy holiday!
