

# COUNCIL FIRE

Council for First Inhabitants Rights and Equality

## Native Youth Need You

Native Youth are at risk - in their homes and communities, many Native youth face extreme poverty, hunger, alcoholism, substance abuse and family violence. Unemployment is 80 percent on some reservations, so getting a job is rare, even part time work can't be found. In addition, they lack proper healthcare and education, and many are without clean water or inside plumbing.

There is no dispute that historical trauma, underfunded federal programs, and failure of the federal government to honor treaties has made life difficult for indigenous people. They deserve better than they have received. It would be impossible to make up for the atrocities of the past, but we can start today with making sure the cycle of despair and depression ends.

Youth suicide was once virtually unheard of within the tribes. Child protection, sustained by traditional practices and beliefs flourished among Native Americans, and everyone in a community was responsible for the young people. But these practices were often lost as the federal government forced assimilation and placed children — often against their parents' wishes — in "boarding schools" that were designed to immerse Indian children in European culture.

There are more than five million in the U.S. that identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native (AI/AN), and the population is growing at a faster rate than the general population. Between the 2000 and the 2010 census, the AI/AN population grew 26.7 percent (1.1 million) which is nearly three times the growth of the overall populations (9.7 percent). Native youth represent a large population, with 28.3 percent below the age of 18 (2008 Census), and more than 2.1 million Native Americans are under the age of 24.

One-third of AI/AN children live in poverty, versus 13 percent in the United States. They graduate high school at a rate 17 percent lower than the national average. Their substance-abuse rates are higher. They're twice as likely as any other race to die before the age of 24. They have two times the rate of abuse and neglect. Their experience with post-traumatic stress disorder rivals the rates of returning veterans from Afghanistan."

Those are huge numbers, and they are growing bigger every day.

Native youth represent hope, and we cannot afford to stand idle while this hope is snuffed out. You can help, if we turn away from any community, then all communities suffer.

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## The Facts on Native Youth in Peril

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among AI/AN youth age 15 to 24 years old.
  - Native teens experience the highest rates of suicide of any population in the United States- at least 3.5 times higher than the national average.
  - Alaska has the highest rate of suicide in the country, with 22.6 suicides per 100,000 people, compared with 12 suicides for every 100,000 people nationally. And Alaskan women kill themselves at a rate that is 19 time higher than those of other races!
- American Indians and Alaska Natives have the youngest population of any racial/ethnic group in the United States, 2.1 Million (42 percent) of the total American Indian and Alaska Native population are under the age of 25.
- 32.4% of the population under-18 lives in poverty
- Approximately 13% of homes in Indian Country lack safe drinking water and proper waste removal systems
- AI/AN communities experience rates of violent crime nearly twice as high as in the general population.
- There are less than 3,000 tribal and federal law enforcement officers to patrol the more than 56 million acres of Indian Country.
- 15% of AI/AN youth are involved in gang activity, compared to 8% of Latino youth and 6% of African American youth.
- Violence, including intentional injuries, homicide and suicide, account for 75% of deaths for AI/AN youth age 12 to 20
- AI/ANs attain the lowest level of education of any racial or ethnic group in the United States. Graduation rates for AI/AN high school students are around 50% nationwide, compared to over 75% for white students.
- AI/AN youth are arrested at a rate of three times the national average, and 79% of youth in the Federal Bureau of Prison's custody are AI/AN
- The national graduation rate for AI/AN high school students hovers around 50% in comparison to over 75% for white students. Only 13.3% of AI/ANs have obtained undergraduate degrees, versus 24.4% of the general population
- Recent research shows that while the US child mortality rate for children ages 1 to 14 has decreased by 9% since 2000, it has increased by 15% among AI/AN children
- AI/AN teenagers, young people, and middle-aged adults have the highest rates of methamphetamine use and associated trauma in the United States. Additionally, some international drug cartels are increasingly targeting Indian Country as a methamphetamine market.

**Those who were here first are still waiting**

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