

2015 Alice Bigpond Roach Memorial Award



Tiffany Ramirez
Seminole Nation of Oklahoma
Wewoka, OK

In 2009, Tiffany Ramirez completed her junior year at Eufaula high school in Eufaula, Oklahoma; applied for the WIA Summer youth program and was accepted.

As a summer youth, she was placed in the Career Service office as a receptionist/clerk. The next summer she showed interest in law and she was contracted PT with Seminole Nation Tribal court for the next three summers. She started as a court runner; learning the day to day activities, she became familiar with the court process and terminology; she has served as the Court Specialist the past two years. Tiffany has recently been hired as a permanent employee within the Probation department.

She also serves as a positive mentor to the children. She has made home visits to educate the kids about the court system, took them to local parks, to participate in activities or just listen to them talk. During the Tribal court camp, she assisted with the planning and organizing groups.

She is involved in the Road Adoption program through the Probation program; and the Juvenile Task Force created for youth in need of representation within the state and tribal court system.

Tiffany's education started at Seminole State College, and then continued at the University of Central Oklahoma, where she will graduate in December of 2015 with a B.S. in Criminal Justice with future plans to become a lawyer and a Tribal judge.

Tiffany gives credit to her grandmother, for being the example leader in her life. She influenced her life and taught her leadership skills; to always listen, have integrity, be respectful to others, and if you fall get back up. Most important, you can do anything if you put your mind to it.

Ms. Ramirez found her passion working with juveniles in the tribal court system; she can relate to them because she has been through similar struggles and understands how complicated life can be at times. Many Native American youths do not have positive role models or even a role model in their lives, they need someone to listen to them. She believes if she can make a difference in their life, she has done her job of making a better community.

Tiffany is Absentee Shawnee and Seminole.

About Alice Bigpond Roach

Alice Bigpond Roach, from the Yuchi Tribe of Oklahoma, was born in Mounds, Oklahoma to Albert and Nellie Cooper Bigpond in 1928. She married Delius Roach in 1948 and they had three sons, Chuck, Damon, and Kevin. She was of Methodist faith and a member of Trinity Methodist Church in Lincoln.

Alice was the Director of Employment and Training for the Lincoln Indian Center. She also served on their Board of Directors and was Executive Director of the Center from 1981-82. She was a member of the Private Industry Council, Executive and Strategic Planning Committees for the Community Human Services Planning Council, Lincoln Action Program Board of Directors, Nebraska Job Training Council, Nebraska Commission for National and Community Service, and National Advisory Council for Native American Employment and Training. Alice served as co-chair of the National Indian Adult Education Association, and president of the Nebraska Indian Education Association.

Alice served as the Chairperson of the National Indian and Native American Employment and Training Conference (NINAETC) held in San Diego, California in 1992. The Participant Awards Luncheon exists today due to Alice's tenacity during a NINAETC Planning Committee meeting for the 1989 NINAETC in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Alice felt that our work in the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration centered on building a strong Native American workforce and we should recognize the individuals in our programs. After a healthy debate, the Committee agreed to incorporate the Participant Recognition.

If there was a definition in the dictionary for "Classy Lady," Alice Bigpond Roach would be listed. Alice also fulfilled a motherly role for a number of our Indian and Native American Grantee directors.

Alice passed away on May 21, 1995 in her home surrounded by family and several close friends.



2015 Howard Yackus Memorial Scholarship Award



Natasha Louis Herman

Sicangu Nation

Employment and Training

Rosebud Sioux, South Dakota

Natasha Louise Herman was largely affected by drugs and alcohol in her family while growing up and continues to be affected by it. Natasha also recognizes the huge impact that drugs and alcohol has on the reservation and has a great desire to start helping people and the families that are affected by drugs and alcohol. Natasha has chosen the career path of becoming a Licensed Addictions counselor.

This May, Natasha graduated from the University of South Dakota with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a Bachelor of Science in Addiction Studies. The Sicangu Nation Employment and Training Program placed Natasha in an internship with the Rosebud Sioux Tribe Alcohol Treatment Program during the summer of 2013 to confirm the career path she has chosen. Natasha was placed again this summer and has gained valuable field experience which has helped her excel in the classroom.

The continued opportunities to intern and work directly in the field of her chosen career will play a huge role in obtaining the goal of becoming a Licensed Addiction counselor. She plans to continue her education working toward a Master's Degree.

Natasha is a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe.

About Howard Yackytooanipah

Howard Yackytooanipah, an enrolled member of the Comanche Nation was born at the Fort Sill Indian Hospital in 1932 to Joe and Florence Yackytooanipah of Lawton Oklahoma. Howard's family abbreviated their family name to "Yackus" for the benefit of non-Comanches. Growing up, Howard loved to Powwow, and fancy war danced at every opportunity. While in high school he and his brother Kenneth, his cousin Melvin Ahhaitty and friends would hitch-hike every weekend to various powwows and tribal celebrations all over Oklahoma.

After high school Howard enlisted in the United States Navy. Howard served our Nation proudly as a Corpsman. He was attached to a number of Marine Corps units during his two tours of duty, spending 11 months in Vietnam. He left the Navy in 1966 and was relocated to the Los Angeles area. While in Los Angeles, Mr. Yackus became active in the American Indian Community by taking part in local Powwows and American Indian sports organizations with bowling being Howard's favorite pastime.

In 1972, Howard played a fundamental role in organizing the Golden State Gourd Dance Society and served numerous times as the organization's president. During this time, Howard put away his fancy war dance clothes and took up the "Straight Dance" and was a champion dancer. He was an active supporter in the early years of the Southern California Indian Center, Inc., then known as the Orange County Indian Center (OCIC). Howard was always there for fund raising events to support cultural activities like the Annual OCIC Powwow.

After OCIC incorporated and captured its first Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) grant. Mr. Yackus was tasked by the OCIC Board to manage the new grant and became the director of the OCIC Manpower Development Program.

Howard Yackus served his people all his adult life in both work and play. He was a role model to many and mentored numerous young Indian people and remained active all his life. Howard left us too soon and tragically. On Sunday August 31st, 1986 while attending a Pow-wow at the Barona Indian Reservation, Howard returned home to Cerritos to golf with plans to return to the Pow-wow that evening. That day was the day that Howard and his new family were lost to us as an Aeromexico jet crashed into his home.



2015 Outstanding Employer Award (477 Grantee)



Kopps On The Run, L.L.C.
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
Durant, Oklahoma

Kopps on the Run is a drug and alcohol collection facility, owned and managed by Choctaw Tribal Member Lena Kopps. Lena is a valuable asset to the Choctaw Nation WIA OJT program. Lena accepted two of our WIA participants for on the job training at her facility.

Lena provided the participants with valuable employment skills and encourages them to further their education. Lena provides opportunities to obtain certifications in Psyche medics, sample collection, hair and urine drug collecting. Lena also supports OJT participants to attend Kiamichi Vocational Technology Center to become certified in phlebotomy. Upon completion of their training, they were offered employment with Kopps on the Run L.L.C.

With the support of the Choctaw Nation and its tribal members participating through the WIA programs, Kopps on the Run received the 86th Annual Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year award from the Hugo Chamber of Commerce in November of 2014.

Lena has been nominated for Outstanding Employer Award for her positive attitude, creative ideas, and her dedication to helping Native Americans build their futures. She goes above and beyond to assist participants.

2015 Outstanding Employer Award (166 Grantee)



Native Health
Phoenix Indian Center
Phoenix, Arizona

Native Health is an Urban Clinic and a federally qualified Health Center providing primary medical, dental, behavioral health, WIC and disease preventive services.

Native Health works with Phoenix Indian Center in the Workforce and Employment Program. As of this date, twenty-five WEP individuals have been placed and Native Health has hired nine employees, all within the Medical Department. The areas of training are Medical Assistant, Dental Assistant, Customer Service Representative, Medical clerk and Data entry clerk, just to name a few. WEP is a temporary training period to gain soft and hard skills. OJT is available as well through NWS and Native Health to share the cost and opportunity for permanent employment.

This Department is administered by Deanna Sangster, Health Services Administrator and Justina Young, R.N. NHW Clinic Practice Manager who are supporters of the WEP. They understand and value WEP-it gives them a chance to see the "potential employee". They have been great mentors to all the WEP participants and taken additional time to help with the skills.

This year the clinic partnered with Native Workforce and provided three OJT's and seven WEP trainees at the Phoenix Center and Phoenix Native Health at Central and Northwest Phoenix serving over 17,000 individuals per year.

In the tradition of our Native American heritage, we demonstrate hospitality and respect toward every person we encounter. We are committed to offer the highest quality health care services available.

Native Health's mission is to provide holistic, patient-centered, culturally sensitive health and wellness services to all people.

2015 Outstanding Participant Award (166 Grantee)



Ora Parker
Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska
Winnebago, Nebraska

In 2011 Ora Parker started to work with the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska TANF Program. She is the mother of six boys and three girls. She started as an emergency hire and worked her way into a full-time position as a TANF case worker and later promoted to case manger.

Ora likes working with people, she is patient under pressure, she has the ability to work smoothly and communicates well with her clients. She is firm yet compassionate and respectful in every way. She takes the time needed with each individual and is courteous to all no matter the mood when they arrive. Those individuals leave with a smile knowing Ora has done her best to help them. She works hard to find solutions to the hardships people experience and understands that she can't do everything and some things are best left for the individual to achieve for growth.

Ora is an asset to the TANF program and its clients. She goes above and beyond her duties, she has a big heart and it shows in every day in her actions. She is self-motivated and dedicated to her work. She has been role model for her peers.

Ora keeps in mind where she came from, she and her husband lived month to month on his part time job at a hospital and she would clean houses for extra money to pay the electric bill. No matter how hard things were, giving up was never an option for them. They had to keep going for the sake of their children.

The family is involved in their native culture; her boys cut wood, and haul rock for the sweat lodge ceremonies attended on a weekly basis. They have come a long way and are self sufficient as compared to a few years ago.

Ora is extremely thankful to the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska for giving her the opportunity to work for them. She plans to continue to do the best and be a good role model for her children and for her clients.

Ora is a member of the Omaha Tribe.

2015 Outstanding Participant Award (477 Grantee)



Edward Nixon
Cherokee Nation
Tahlequah, OK

Edward Nixon, with only a GED, worked in several different jobs throughout his life such as mechanic, maintenance worker, cook/dishwasher and a welder's assistant. The only skills Edward claimed he had were very basic skills just enough for him to perform the jobs he was hired to do. Edward learned as much as possible with every job opportunity along the way.

Edward had several barriers that kept him from really advancing in his various jobs. Edward is hearing impaired and that has kept him from going further in school and has caused problems with communicating with people and limited his employment opportunities. Edward was referred to Cherokee Nation Vocational Rehab program where they were able to do a hearing evaluation and assist with the purchase of a hearing aid. The new hearing aid provided Edward with the confidence he needed to continue his education. Edward decided to participate in the Cherokee Nation Building Trades Program so that it would help him gain the knowledge and skills that were needed to do carpentry work.

Edward has always been interested in carpentry. Through the Cherokee Nation Building Trades Program Edward was able to train with local building contractors. After successful completion of the program, Edward was able to start his own business – Ed's Woodworking. Edward states that, "without the help of the Cherokee Nation Career Services P.L. 102-477 Program, I would not have had the chance that I have now and I appreciate all the program has done for me."

2015 Outstanding Participant Award (477 Grantee)



Kyle Dewayne Stick
Cherokee Nation
Tahlequah, OK

Kyle Dewayne Stick was going from job to job and his journey to full time employment was tough. Kyle had a tract record of alcoholism that he struggled with throughout his life. The choices he made in life resulted in consequences that would alter his path. He was charged with multiple felony counts and misdemeanors and his continued behavior eventually resulted in being incarcerated for a felony DUI.

Upon his release, he returned to Cherokee Nation Career Services and participated in the Day Training Program. Kyle took advantage of this opportunity and excelled at his training site. He complied with all his drug court requirements and legal obligations. When his Day Training program came to an end, he was placed on the P.L. 102-477 Work Experience Program. He was assigned to W.W. Hastings Hospital in the Dietary Department. Mr. Stick was quick to learn his new role in the department and made a great impression on his supervisors. He displayed a positive attitude, great work ethic and willingness to do all that was asked of him and more. All the while, Kyle was moving through his drug court program he maintained exemplary attendance. While participating in the Work Experience Program, Kyle was recommended for a position in the Dietary Department with countless recommendations from hospital staff including his supervisor.

Kyle has proven that people can change and come full circle. He is aware that he was viewed in a negative light for several years. But with the assistance and confidence of his tribe, Kyle is now a self-sufficient taxpaying employee. In a time when others could have easily said that Kyle didn't deserve another opportunity, the continued collaboration of tribal and federally funded programs continue to show the hard work, dedication and change one opportunity can make.

2015 Outstanding Participant Award (166 Grantee)



Charles Verdin
Inter-Tribal Council
Of Louisiana
Houma, Louisiana

Charles Verdin is from a small town where he grew up fast. He was raised by a single mother and in his younger years was a good kid who liked school, went to church and obeyed his mother.

But at the age of 15, he starting working on a fishing boat, and made good money however, he became an alcoholic and drug addict, had no respect for himself or others. At the age of 18 he traded the fishing life for the oil field, and worked on tug boat. A year later he became a father, earned his captains license and started making more money. The drinking and drugs became worse; his firstborn was pushed aside for the drug life.

He was busted for drugs twice and sent to prison for 2 ½ years. Four years later, he refused to take a drug test for his job and lost his captains license. He was no longer making enough to support his habit, so he started selling everything he owned to support his habit. He went to rehab but was kicked out three times for failing the drug screens.

Charles had purchased fake crack from two guys, went looking for them, and he found them. There was an argument, and then he saw a flash of light and heard a ringing in his ear. He found himself on the ground and saw the two guys running up the street. He ran after them and stopped because blood was pouring from the left temple of his head.

Reality had set in. He could feel his heart beat start to slow down. His eyes started to close by themselves and he couldn't stop them. He tried to move but couldn't move a muscle in his body. He started to cry and realized that he had wasted his life with drugs and he was going to die on the side of the road. But he remembered his cousin had once told him about the life available to him through Jesus; all he had to do was call on His name and He would save him. He cried out to Jesus and was saved that early morning on the side of the road.

He had been shot in the head and the bullet went through the temple and out of the top of his head and he recovered by the grace of God and given a second chance of life.

He met his wife, Joboa, at church. Then he turned himself in for his last drug charge, told the judge the truth about the change that happened to him. The judge felt like he was to give Charles a second chance instead of the 25 years to life.

Charles felt like God opened the door to obtain assistance from the Inter-Tribal Council of Louisiana, Inc's Native American Employment and Training Program. He was able to attend training again, go back to work and obtain the job he loves to do as a licensed Boat captain w/towing endorsement, as well as provide for his family.

Charles thanks God for the Inter-Tribal Council and the tribes' United Houma Nation Vocational Rehabilitation Services provided. Without those programs and encouragement from Lora Ann and Lanor the struggles could have been longer.

For almost seven years, Charles is living a drug free life with peace, joy, happiness and love for others.

Despite choosing a path early in his life that could have left him destitute, he is the picture of tenacity and proves what our Native American programs and determination for a change can do.