

## **Wind River Health Promotion**

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The Wind River Health Promotion (WRHP) program has been providing services to all youth living in the Wind River Reservation community since the early 1980's. The program had been created out of necessity during the time the Wind River Reservation suffered a series of suicides. The program is a prevention program working with all youth living within Fremont County.

During the early 1980's the Northern Arapaho tribe suffered a rash of suicides among young men. Hoping to keep this from happening again, the Northern Arapaho tribe started WRHP to provide a variety of services for troubled youth. When it first began, the WRHP program was housed at the St. Stephen's Mission and their main goal has been to promote wellness and strengthen community ties. They also incorporate culture and language into their activities as much as possible.

The WRHP program is overseen by a Board of Directors who are either Native American or of Native American descent. WRHP tries to work with community elders as much as possible, especially with activities that are culturally relevant. WRHP also tries to maintain partnerships with the schools to help identify and provide services for at-risk students. At-risk students are youths who are in danger of dropping out of school or have dropped out due to drug and/or alcohol related issues, or they are in and out of the juvenile court system, are suffering from some form of mental illness such as depression, or they have just lost their way.

In the past, WRHP has worked with many of the drop-out students to get them back into school or to study for their GEDs. Many of the students had earned their GEDs and even went on to college and graduated. Others had earned their GEDs and enlisted in the military. WRHP had helped many of the at-risk youths turn their lives around and make better lives for themselves.

Over the years WRHP has been around, they created Fremont High. Fremont High was created as an alternative school for students who had dropped out or had been expelled from their schools. WRHP worked very hard to help these students get an education. When the schools had limited transportation, WRHP workers

would themselves bus the students into the school. Over time, the county took over Fremont High and changed the name to Pathfinder High School.

Today WRHP is still working with the schools and the community to reach out to troubled youth and help them as best as they can. Unfortunately, due to the No Child Left Behind Act, the time WRHP can spend in the schools working with the at-risk students is very limited and at most times, WRHP has to wait until after school hours to work with the students. WRHP has held several after-school activities for the youth and from time to time they have recruited tribal elders to work with the youth. The elders tell them stories, show them how to bead, make drums and sing powwow songs. WRHP works in conjunction with the Wind River Tribal Youth Program (WRTYP) in Ethete many times in organizing drug and alcohol free activities. Having elders work with the youth has an enormous impact on the emotional well-being of troubled youth. The elders provide wisdom and guidance to the youth and help them find their way once again.

WRHP works with many of the other tribal youth programs on the reservation and surrounding area to provide help for troubled youth. During the holidays when teen suicide rates are high, WRHP and other programs plan various activities to provide distractions and keep the youth busy and involved. Last year, the WRHP had co-sponsored the Day in the Park in Lander, WY. This was an alcohol-free and drug free activity that was open to the public. With Eagles Wings, WRHP provided the food and it was just a big social gathering for everyone to enjoy. Everyone was invited to this event; all tribal and non-tribal residents of the Wind River Reservation and Fremont County were welcome. WRHP also helps the WRTY with their weekly sweat lodge ceremonies and talking circles that are held for the reservation youth. Holding these cultural events helps the youth re-connect their culture and helps them find pride in being Native American.

Currently, WRHP is unable to organize as many activities as they once did due to limited funds. The WRHP program is overseen by a sole employee, Georgie Crawford. She has been with WRHP since 1992, and in 1998 she became the Director of the program. In this time of financial uncertainty, Crawford has been researching and applying for grants to help supplement the program's budget. The WRHP program is one of many programs on the reservation that are dedicated to the betterment of the youth in the community. WRHP welcomes all youth to its program, not just tribal youth but non-tribal youth as well. Time and

time again the tribe has shown they are dedicated to the protection of the youth by creating programs such WRHP to provide help to troubled youth. Although many youth do not seek help and believe they are alone, they are not. Tribal elders are willing to teach them and guide them and the programs like WRHP are there to provide the support they need to get back on their paths and make a better life. By connecting with their culture and learning where they come from, they will have that pride of knowing they are descendents of a proud and noble race and that they have nothing to be ashamed of. Looking for help is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign that you want a better life for yourself and that you are not giving up.

The WRHP program is available to provide as much support as they can and anyone looking to donate their time to the program or looking for support from WRHP can contact Georgie Crawford at 307-856-3405.