

United National Indian Tribal Youth A Historical Timeline

1976 -- UNITY established: *UNITY was founded by J.R. Cook, Cherokee, in Weatherford, OK, and conducted its first national conference in Oklahoma City. J.R. served as Executive Director without a salary for about 7 years. J.R.'s mother, the late Golda Cook, supported UNITY during the early years.*

1978 -- UNITY Moves Headquarters: *The UNITY headquarters was moved from Weatherford, Oklahoma to Oklahoma City. Vivian Payne contributed the use of her former home, rent-free, for UNITY to use as its headquarters.*

1978 -- Andy Payne Memorial Foot Races: *UNITY conducted the first annual Andy Payne Memorial Foot Races in honor of the late Andy Payne, Cherokee, who, in 1928, won the Trans-American Footrace from Los Angeles to New York City.*

1979 -- First White House Native youth gathering in Washington, DC: *UNITY, NIAA and the Department of Labor co-sponsored a conference in Washington, D.C. at George Washington University. During the event the youth assembled on the south lawn of the White House where President Jimmy Carter and his son Chip met with about 300 Native students.*

1980 -- New Breed of American Indians: *Paul Harvey broadcasted a story about UNITY on his national radio program entitled, 'A New Breed of American Indians' that recognized UNITY for its work with Native youth.*

1980 -- Willie Nelson: *Willie Nelson, a nationally recognized entertainer, held a benefit concert to raise funds that helped UNITY through a time of financial need. Music scholarship were offered to UNITY youth following the concert.*

1980 -- Declaration of Independence: *UNITY youth gathered in Billings, Montana and adopted a Declaration of Independence that asserted their right to express their concerns and goals regarding the health and welfare of Native people.*

1980s -- Council of Eagles: *UNITY Created the Council of Eagles that was made up of selected Native youth who served as UNITY ambassadors. The first Council of Eagles included Mary Kim Titla, Vivian Juan Saunders, Rose Abrahamson, Arvo Mikkanen, and Darrell Mease.*

1980 -- Wayne Newton: *Wayne Newton, Las Vegas icon and well known singer and entertainer, donated an Arabian stallion, "WN Alegria," to UNITY.*

1980s -- 2000 Campaign: *UNITY first received federal funding in the late 80s for a program entitled the American Indian/Alaska Native Youth 2000 Campaign. The program resulted in the Healing Generation's Journey to the Year 2000, a publication that set forth twelve strategies for addressing Native youths' issues of greatest concern.*

1981 -- UNITY conducts National Hotshot Basketball Championships: *The Championships were patterned after the Pepsi Cola/NBA Hotshot contest. The project encouraged UNITY youth to sponsor local hotshot contests, report the results, and compete to become the national champion from among the winners of the local competitions.*

1982 -- Call for a Youth Council Network: *To promote the creation of a national youth council, UNITY issued a call for the creation of local youth councils.*

1985 -- First Youth Council established: *The Wind River Reservation Youth Council became the first youth council to be established.*

1985 -- Senate Hearing: *Seven Native youth testified before the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. about issues affecting Indian Country.*

1990s -- UNITY Basketball: *In the 1990s UNITY sponsored basketball teams that won two National Indian Athletic Association (N.I.A.A.) championships. The Atlanta Hawks teamed up with UNITY to promote "Success on and off the court." NBA players and coaches visited Indian communities in Wyoming, Florida, Oklahoma, and New Mexico.*

1990s -- Earth Ambassadors: *In 1990, thanks to a grant from the Administration for Native Americans, UNITY established the Earth Ambassadors program to promote environmental stewardship.*

1992 -- National UNITY Council and Executive Committee: *The National UNITY Council, which elected its first Executive Committee in 1992, was formally established at the National UNITY Conference in St. Paul, MN.*

1993 -- War on Drugs and Alcohol Abuse: *The UNITY Council of Trustees declared war on alcohol abuse. By taking this action, UNITY committed its resources to the war effort to defeat alcohol abuse. A related nationally distributed poster featured actor Wes Studi, and UNITY youth leaders LoVina Louie, Justin Deegan, and Temet Aguilar.*

1994 -- UNITY Fire: *The UNITY Fire was introduced at the 1994 National UNITY conference in San Diego, California. Within the first days, the UNITY Fire faced extinguishment from the local fire department, were it not for the UNITY conference participants standing guard around the fire.*

1996 -- Senate hearing: *Four Native Youth testified at hearings conducted by the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. concerning issues affecting Indian Country.*

2001 -- Celebrate Fitness: *Members of nine Indian youth councils designed and implemented Celebrate Fitness! projects as part of a youth-led program of activities designed to promote healthy lifestyles among Native Americans (2001-2004).*

2006 -- First Lady's Luncheon: *Four UNITY youths were invited to attend a charity luncheon benefiting UNITY and hosted by First Lady Laura Bush in Washington D.C. The luncheon was themed, "The First Americans." During the luncheon Tony and Karl Duncan performed Hoop Dances. UNITY Executive Committee members Juanita Toledo and Joshua Tso presented gifts to Mrs. Bush on behalf of the UNITY organization.*

2006 -- Strengthening Native Families: *UNITY conducted a project to combat social issues affecting Indian Country by strengthening Native families.*

2006 -- Celebrate Native Fitness: *Building upon the successful 'Celebrate Fitness' project, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported Celebrate Native Health with grants that allowed 13 youth councils to promote efforts within their communities to lower the barriers to healthy eating and physical activity and thereby reduce childhood obesity at community and tribal levels. (2005-2009)*

2013 -- New Executive Director: *UNITY founder, JR Cook, stepped down as Executive Director and was succeeded by Mary Kim Titla, San Carlos Apache. J.R. plans to write UNITY's history.*

2013: -- UNITY moves its headquarters to Arizona: *UNITY Moved its headquarters from Oklahoma City to Mesa, Arizona.*

2014 -- Today's Native Leaders: *UNITY and the US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) partnered on the Today's Native Leaders initiative, a four-year project designed to offer regional and national trainings and learning opportunities for American Indian youth to increase positive outcomes in their schools, communities, and family environments.*

2014 -- 25 Under 25: *UNITY introduced its first class of 25 Under 25 Youth Leaders at the National Conference in Portland, Oregon. The 25 Under 25 Native Youth Leadership Awards honors, recognizes, and celebrates the achievements of Native youth between the ages of 14 and 25 who embody UNITY's core mission and are committed to developing their spiritual, mental, physical and social well-being. New classes are selected in even years.*

2015 -- First Lady Michelle Obama: *First Lady Michelle Obama spoke to 1,300 Native youth at the White House Tribal Youth Gathering in Washington D.C. UNITY co-sponsored the event.*

2015 -- Revival of the Earth Ambassadors program: *UNITY reinstated the Earth Ambassadors program thanks to a matching grant from the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community. Thirteen youth were selected from among dozens of applications. The 12 members of the NUC Executive Committee became honorary members. Subsequent Ambassador classes are to be selected during odd calendar years.*