

2023 Mid-Year Regional Report

“Starting something beautiful”

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Members of the National UNITY Council,

First I want to start off by saying what an honor and privilege it is to be serving under UNITY as the Executive Committee Southwest Regional Representative. I do not think I knew what I was getting myself into when I accepted the position. I had very little knowledge about UNITY but after hearing the pitch on what it was all about, I immediately hopped aboard. My passion is the Youth. My belief is in the Youth. We have a little saying and it goes, the Youth are the leaders of tomorrow, they are the leaders right now!



New guy who dis?

July 2022

I was a little late to the party having not attended the 2022 National UNITY Conference. By this time I was finalizing everything needed for the position. I do have to give a big thank to our 2022-2023 Madam President Chenoa Scippio for getting me acquainted with the Executive Committee. It's something we both have in common which is the passion to do to this work. Although I was new to the group, thankfully I've had many experiences working with the Youth prior to the start of the term.

Believe it or not, my first time meeting the Executive Committee was on a FaceTime call during the National Conference! I was filled with such wonder, awe, and excitement. Right then and there, I knew that these were my kind of people. Being introduced to more leaders who hold the same values and beliefs is like no other. To be amongst the best of the best, I knew I had to bring A-game.

August-September 2022

Even though I was new to the game I did not let that keep me from being proactive within the community. It was also during these months where I had yet begun another semester University of New Mexico. Here is where I study civil engineering with an emphasis in environmental engineering. It's great as I assist with research under UNM's Center for Water and the Environment. Our team conducts research on Indigenous Lands that have been impacted by mining legacy. And better yet, I have the privilege working with my hometown Laguna Pueblo. Our goal to investigate the plants, crops, and water to see if there is any contaminant transport within. It's a lot of good information that I think goes unnoticed. Not too many community members are involved especially the Youth. It's a little hard to believe but this information was never brought to me in grade school in which it should have been. We are talking decades of history that has impacted Laguna so tragically. I am here to somehow be an advocate not just for my community, but for all Indigenous communities impacted by environmental racism. To somehow correct what's been done and bring light. I believe it all starts with getting the Youth involved. It was during these months where I was able to deliver a couple presentations which was a great step in uplifting the big goal. The foundation has been set, now it's just continuing to elevate this information.

October- December 2022

In the month of October is where I held my first Youth Meet Up for the Southwest Region. It was a good crowd as we were able to connect, identify, and address solutions to for our community problems. We covered a lot and came to a crucial realization that work needed to be done. As overwhelming as it was it was also a healthy space where we could express and be vulnerable. If anything we grew stronger and formed unity.

November was an unexpected surprise as we attended the Native Youth Forum in Washington D.C. It was my first time ever being in D.C. and never would I have thought to be in a setting of that magnitude. To be introduced to more of my brothers and sisters was overwhelming but in a good way! There were just so many good ideas and reminders being contributed while we were at Forum. It reinstilled hope and provided a path for the future. I was grateful for the experience and grateful once again for the White House Native American Heritage Month Celebration. Once again who would have thought! The most moving part for me was hearing Deb Halaand's words especially hearing it in our Laguna language! Not to mention the first lady of the United States, Jill Biden! I was in awe the whole time and still managed to get some good flicks in!



Pink House?

In December I was honored to be a part of the 2022 Southwest Healing Circle. It was yet another large gathering which took me by awe again. It just opened my eyes to see how many youth councils are present in the Southwest. Particularly I worked with the KEWA Truth Youth Council from Santo Domingo Pueblo in New Mexico. I couldn't have asked for better group as everyone was in cooperation. Here is where we identified the issues in the community and came up with possible solutions. We made monumental progress as they created their own initiative which is not easy to do. I was very proud of them even when times grew difficult. They persevered! It was such a great time! I was proud and uplifted by everyone! Times like this remind you why you do what you do and who you do it for.



Kewa Strong!

January 2023

I'm thankful our executive committee got to travel to Mesa Arizona to fulfill a much need initiative workshop. We got down and dirty hoping to create something big! I'm proud to that we did. We did were going around in circles until it finally clicked! We have such a passionate group who felt they didn't finish what they started. We decided to extend and tweak the resolution from the year before. It's a move that I don't think anyone saw coming but there must be understanding that these kinds of things don't happen within a year as much as we'd like. Regardless the "Restoring the Spirit of Native Youth" initiative lives on and will continue for many years to come. The focus here to is to recollect what we loss during the years of covid while also becoming stronger. To identify and solve problems through community projects. To revive and live on.



Mesa, AZ baby

It's crazy to think how fast time has gone. From here on out it's going to be boom, boom, BOOM. I have a lot of exciting events taking place leading up to Nationals. I look forward to sharing precious moments with those along the way! I'm learning a lot and will continue to do so. I'd like to thank all those for showing me the way! Let's keep the ball rolling.

Thank you,
Derek