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Pathkeepers for Indigenous Knowledge

Youth attending the camp held by Pathkeepers for Indigenous Knowledge traveled to Washington, D.C. for a couple days.


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Nonprofit Gives Native Youth Chance to Talk to Senators and Horses

VINCENT SCHILLING | AUGUST 19, 2013

It's almost time to head back to school —back to books and homework. But students who attended the first Native Youth Camp in July will have some fond memories to look back on.

Pathkeepers for Indigenous Knowledge, a new nonprofit organization, invited 24 Native Youth to attend a summer camp on a horse farm where they learned life lessons and traditional Native practices from elders. In addition to this emphasis on culture, they also got a taste of Indian policy when they met with senators and other officials in Washington, D.C.

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The Native youth spent the week at a horse farm in Culpeper, Virginia. (Pathkeepers for Indigenous Knowledge)

The best part for the youth and their families is that Pathkeepers paid the entire bill for the week-long camp.

The owner of the horse farm, located in Culpeper, Virginia is president of Pathkeepers and former practicing attorney in American Indian law Angelina Okuda-Jacobs. She said there are many reasons she started the nonprofit

“Every day across Indian country we are losing our elders and tribal members who hold our history, culture and languages in their hearts. Unfortunately, for many Indian communities, the transfer of this knowledge and customs to our young people is not occurring enough to ensure that the life that we now know as Indian people will continue into future generations,” she said. “We started Pathkeepers to provide opportunities for this transfer, which we believe will have a corresponding benefit on many of the health and social issues pervasive throughout Indian country.”

She believes the youth camp, which teaches both tradition and contemporary issues, is a perfect mixture for young people.

During the camp, youth aged 8 to 16 identified plants and herbs, used traditional tools and technologies and learned fire-making, Indian games and social activities, including lacrosse. Campers were able to take the results of many activities home with them like herbal salves, beadwork, pottery, poetry, and journals.

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Camp activities included pottery. (Pathkeepers for Indigenous Knowledge)

Campers also took a two-day trip to Washington, D.C. where they toured federal agencies, and met congressional members and staff, all related to Indian affairs. They met with U.S. Sen. Jon Tester of Montana; Mary Pavel, staff director and chief counsel for the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs; Mike Smith, deputy director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs; Chairman Darrin Old Coyote of the Crow Nation, and other key staff and officials from the U.S. Department of the Interior.

“We witnessed a remarkable transformation of our Indian youth over the course of the camp. The camp touched these young people in a deep and profound way emotionally and physically, and also brought out of them cultural memories and skills that were dormant or under-utilized,” Okuda-Jacobs said. “We are grateful to all who participated in the camp and who helped make it a remarkable learning and growing experience for everyone.”

Pathkeepers does not charge a fee for Indian youth to attend the camp and relies on donations, which are tax-deductible. The youth were selected based on a written essay. For more information, visit Pathkeepers.org.

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The campers visited the Department of the Interior while in Washington, D.C. (Pathkeepers for Indigenous Knowledge)

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