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Summer 2019

## Maine-Wabanaki REACH Newsletter, Summer 2019

Wabanaki REACH

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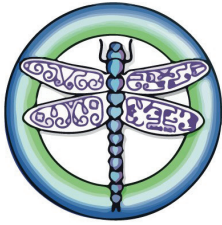
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# Maine-Wabanaki REACH

Restoration • Engagement • Advocacy • Change • Healing

Summer 2019

## From Reconciliation to Restoration

*from the desk of Maria Girouard, Executive Director*

The first six months of 2019 have been a whirlwind for Maine-Wabanaki REACH. We continue fine-tuning ourselves while keeping consistent with our theme of truth, healing, and change. One area we fine-tuned was in the meaning of the “R” in our name. During our earlier work conceptualizing, creating, and supporting the historic Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) 2012-2015, REACH stood for *Reconciliation, Engagement, Advocacy, Change, and Healing*. Throughout the TRC process we often found ourselves having occasion to reflect on reconciliation. What was it? What would it look like? How do we get there? Some seemed eager to rush to reconciliation while others found it difficult to even imagine what could possibly reconcile such an ugly past with all its painful truths.

We have changed the R in REACH to *Restoration*, a word that more accurately reflects our work of restorative practices, restorative talking circles, restorative justice, and decolonization.

2019 has been ripe for connections and collaborations. We connected with clergy through the Maine Council of Churches at a panel discussion entitled *Moving Beyond the Savior Complex: A Panel Discussion About the intersections of Privilege, Decolonization & Advocacy*.

We participated in the public forum *Bicentennial or Bust*, organized by the Maine Humanities Council and the Maine Historical Society in anticipation of Maine’s upcoming bicentennial celebration.

We connected with heads of land trusts in a unique “First Light Learning Journey” and had promising meetings about furthering our corrections work with Commissioner of Corrections Randall Liberty and other Department of Corrections



*Maria speaking in Augusta March 25. Other “Moving Beyond” panelists L-R, Rev. Sara Ewing-Merrill (moderator); Ophelia Hu Kinney (Reconciling Ministries Network); Fatuma Hussein (Immigrant Resource Center)*

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## Restoration *(cont'd)*

staff. We look forward to exploring the many paths that regularly present themselves to us. Finally, planning for our 6th annual *Wabanaki Wellness Gathering* is underway. The gathering will be held October 4-5, 2019 in Portland this year and the program will be built around the theme of “belonging.” Our annual gatherings are a place where Wabanaki people come to connect, share, and learn. They are a combination of workshops, presentations, and celebration. We tap into our own vast network of knowledge and highlight the work of Wabanaki people. This year’s gathering will include an encore staged reading of the hilarious play “Indian Radio Days: An Evolving Bingo Experience,” written by Indigenous playwrights LeAnne Howe and Roxy Gordon, which is open to the public on Friday evening October 4. So, hold the date! And we hope to see you in Portland this Fall.

Thank you for being part of the journey toward truth, healing, and change in the Dawnland.

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### Within the Healing Circle

*Katie Tomer is a graduate student at University of Southern Maine in Portland, studying Policy, Planning, and Management. She has worked with Muskie School’s Justice Policy Program, and we wish her the best as she departs for Oregon in her new position with College Excel. For over five years, Katie, along with Sandra Bassett and Roger Paul, has been facilitating healing circles for Indigenous people living within the Maine state prison system. Here are some of her reflections:*

#### **What motivates you to do this work?**

As the daughter of a Native incarcerated father, my life experience has caused me to think of how circles could make an impact in the lives of every Native person behind bars.

#### **Can you describe the practice and goals of a prison circle?**

The practice of the circle is coming together as members of the Native community for the purpose of sharing truth, supporting healing, and allowing change to occur personally as well as in our communities.

The goal of the circles is to ensure that Native men and women behind bars know that they are part of something and that we have not forgotten about them. As facilitators, we bring home to them. We bring the reminders of the culture, heritage, and traditions through bringing in the medicines, ceremony, and the language. There are usually two facilitators per circle, and the parents of incarcerated Native youth are invited as well.

#### **How would you describe the impact of this work – on participants, the system, and on yourselves?**

Those that attend express gratitude for the circles and consistently request that they happen more often. In terms of the impact on the system, prison staff report that men and women that are part of the circles aren’t ‘getting in trouble’ anymore. I feel like the circles show prison



*Upper West Branch of the Penobscot River*

### Healing Circle *(cont'd)*

staff the power of treating incarcerated men and women with respect, honor and dignity. For myself, I always approach a circle as it is – not the facilitators’ circle, or the circle for just those incarcerated, it is for all of us equally...It is about community and all in attendance are part of this. It has been powerful for me to witness the transformation in those that attend the circles, and it has become more clear to me that I am part of the intergenerational healing that the circles are meant to encourage.

### ***Over the years, how has your process changed or evolved?***

We have always shared prayer and meditation in our circles since day one. Most recently we have been able to bring in CDs of traditional singing as well as beginning lessons of Wabanaki language, specifically Passamaquoddy.



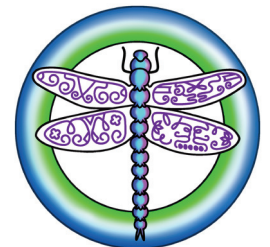
*REACH tabling at the Bicentennial or Bust forum in Hermon, ME on March 15*



## Maine’s Bicentennial and Mainers Reach for the Truth

*by Barbara Kates*

Is your community planning to celebrate Maine’s bicentennial at community events in 2020? What will this telling of history include?



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## Bicentennial *(cont'd)*

This is a great time to ask questions!

A town historical society volunteer calls: "I want people to know that history does not start with European arrival and end in our grandparents' time. I want them to know that it is long and continuing."

Advocates are working to bring the truth to their neighbors, friends, and colleagues. They are librarians, historical society leaders, school teachers, faith leaders, and social justice advocates. At the same time, friends of REACH – individuals and organizations – are helping create resources so REACH can meet these needs. They are donating money, telling their friends, making connections within their networks and raising funds.

This Spring at the University of Maine Statehood and Bicentennial Conference in Orono, we set up our art map and materials for Exploring Wabanaki Maine History. Participants entered slowly and shyly; many knew no one else in the room. Fifty historians, history teachers, museum staff and history buffs sat in circle. They seemed almost reluctant as I introduced the program, but as we continued, we shared our inherited and continuing history with some tears, some laughter, and many questions. In the circle following the scripted program, some told their own family story. We heard a woman whose ancestors were early European settlers in this territory. She said she imagines conversations with them as she envisions their world. We heard an Indigenous person whose ancestors stayed in place as others fought over and with them to claim territory. We heard a man whose family was persecuted in Europe and fled to this place of genocide of Wabanaki people. One history teacher told me on leaving, "I am throwing out my lesson plans and creating new ones, and I can't wait to get started."

*detail of Penobscot canoe  
on display at the  
Abbe Museum*



## REACH at Maine Schools and Youth Groups

*by Barbara Kates*

Teachers are noticing what is missing - reading lists without Indigenous authors, Thanksgiving stories without an Indigenous perspective, and science without the knowledge embodied in Indigenous lifeways. REACH offers full-day workshops for teachers (recently hosted at University of Maine) and half-day, onsite programs (recently at the Portland Schools). REACH teacher training gives teachers the grounding needed to dive into young peoples' questions and facilitate teaching of our inherited history and current relations.

REACH facilitators enjoy working with high-school-age youth whose discussion often goes to the heart of the issues. We work with leaders and teachers ahead of time to be sure that the work fits into an existing learning program.

More challenging has been our interactive Exploring Wabanaki Maine History adapted for middle school children. Teachers and students have responded positively. Facilitators and teachers raised questions about what preparation, follow-up, and further adaptation are needed. We know there is more work to be done on this offering, to meet the challenges we

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## Maine Schools *(cont'd)*

face in middle school communities.

Would you like to see change in your school district? Talk to your school folks. How is their teacher training organized? What assistance do they need to meet the requirements of the law and expand who is included in literature, social studies, and science? How can you help?

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Scenes from a 2016 “Radio Days” performance in Sipayik by the Wabanaki Intertribal Theatre Troupe including Dawn Neptune Adams (at left) and John Dennis, Esther Anne and Gabe Paul (above).



*Statements are still being added to the archive of the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission. To access these Statements, go to [digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/maine-wabanaki-trc-statements](https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/maine-wabanaki-trc-statements)*

## Save the Date

### Wabanaki Wellness Gathering is coming to Portland!

*6th annual event to share, learn, network,  
and celebrate!*

**October 4 & 5, 2019**

Includes a Friday night theater performance open to the public

Maine-Wabanaki REACH is reclaiming space  
and creating community in  
ancient kaskok, place of the great blue herons

## The Truth Commission and Beyond

by Penthea Burns

We continue our discussion of the recommendations contained in *Beyond the Mandate: Continuing the Conversation*, the final report of the TRC, by exploring a few updates and activities connected to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). The Commission's report is found at [www.mainewabanakireach.org](http://www.mainewabanakireach.org)

### National ICWA Updates

Four lawsuits seek to challenge ICWA. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), Native American Rights Fund (NARF), and the Association on American Indian Affairs lead the defense of ICWA. The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) provides communications and media support. In addition, regulations established in 2016 require states to collect child welfare data regarding Native children and families to monitor ICWA compliance. The current administration has proposed eliminating about 90% of the data elements, stating that this data collection puts a "burden" on states. A summary of national ICWA issues and ways you can be involved can be found at [www.nicwa.org/policy-update](http://www.nicwa.org/policy-update)

### ICWA Workgroup

The Maine ICWA Workgroup, which reconvened in August 2015, uses the TRC recommendations to help guide their work. Its expanded membership includes representatives from Wabanaki Tribal child welfare programs, community members, as well as participants from Maine's Office of Children and Family Services, Attorney General, and Courts. It is staffed by the Muskie School's Esther Anne. The Workgroup delivered a national webinar for the Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for Tribes called "Coming Together for the Children." View the webinar at [www.tribalinformationexchange.org/index.php/icwa](http://www.tribalinformationexchange.org/index.php/icwa)

The ICWA Workgroup designs and delivers training for Qualified Expert Witnesses (QEW) in Wabanaki Tribal communities. Their recruitment efforts quadrupled the number of QEWs that are ready to serve. They deliver training to the Maine Judiciary on intergenerational trauma, cultural humility, and QEW. They accept new opportunities to provide legal and judicial education as well as create materials and tools. The Workgroup educates itself on legal and justice issues, inviting speakers to provide information that supports their work. Workgroup members participated in a conversation with Maine legislators after a special online viewing of the film *Dawnland*.

Viewing the Tribes as co-case managers of ICWA cases is Maine OCFS policy. Caseworkers are expected to treat the Tribes as a third parent in an ICWA case, there is ongoing communication between Tribal child welfare staff and the Maine OCFS ICWA Liaison, and space is made for co-case management discussion at each ICWA Workgroup meeting. Members work to identify progress, challenges, and agreed-upon actions in relation to the state's case practice with Wabanaki children and families and compliance with ICWA.

The ICWA Workgroup continues to provide ICWA education to all new caseworkers and is publishing an *ICWA Guide for Caseworkers*. They have recently begun sharing REACH's interactive Exploring Wabanaki Maine History during caseworker education, with great success. Caseworkers report having an increased understanding of intergenerational trauma and better recognize the necessity of ICWA.