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7Generations Scholarship Awards Dinner: An evening of community, connection, empowerment and resilience.

The wound is the place where the Light enters you.

--Rumi

July 26, 2019 | Oakland, CA | Sandra Tavel, Communications Manager, NAHC

In a popular waterfront restaurant in Oakland's Jack London square, about twenty families from different generations, tribes and walks of life gathered to celebrate a milestone for their loved ones: the 7Generations Scholarship awards. Native American Health Center (NAHC) proudly hosted this event, which is in its third year. Twelve students from Technical, Community College, 4-year College and graduate schools received over \$22,000 in scholarship monies to support their education. NAHC recognizes the role and importance of education in the health of its community, specifically for American Indians. American Indians are all connected by the effects of how history played out on our lands. We experience both trauma and resilience within our communities. Our people are actively reconnecting to the wisdoms and traditions that were not so long ago, illegal for us to have. It was illegal to be American Indian. Think about that—to have your language, appearance, practices, culture and very being—your identity, be written into government legislation as illegal; and to have that actively enforced by programs with names like *extermination, termination and relocation*.

The Co-Keynote Speaker, Manny Lieras (Navajo and Comanche) is a long-time, committed member of the American Indian community who has poured his heart and soul into educational and enrichment programming for Native youth. In addition to his life-long work in Native youth education, Manny has stepped into the production arena and is an active member of *injunuity*—a collective of artists who make films about the modern, Native experience. He shared a short, animated film from about the boarding school experience that many of our relations have endured. The narrator of the film is Helen Waukazoo (Navajo), Keynote Speaker of the evening and CEO of the Friendship House Association of American Indians. Aside from her official titles, Helen is a daughter, sister, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, friend, and pillar of our community. Helen has a twinkle in her eye and expresses a captivating combination of strength and humor. Helen makes you feel like being your best self—even if you don't know her very well. As she narrated the film about being forced to board a bus that took her far away from her homeland, family and traditions, she watched her mother crying in the distance and her voice broke. The force of the story, its sweeping impact and the Helen's courage moved the room. You could hear tears from almost every point the room. In the film, there is an animated chain that is broken by our resilience and the seeds planted by our



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ancestors to keep going. A plant vine intertwines with and breaks the chain, bursting with flowers.

"In the 60s, there were no programs for American Indians," Helen said. After boarding school, she moved to San Francisco where she began as a secretary in the early days of the Friendship House, which has grown into a thriving organization that helps American Indians heal from substance use. Her vision is compassion and helping people who have lost their way, to find it. Through Helen's programming, people find themselves and connect back to what's been lost. "Get better. Strive for good things and don't let situations stop you," was her conclusion. She reminded us that our ancestors planted seeds and paved ways for us to continue. She reminded us of their hard work, joked that in her day, she had to look things up in books rather than press a button. She counted the Elders in the room. She told us to listen to them.

The connections in the room went back to when our Elders first arrived in Oakland and quickly formed community. NAHC's Chief Executive Officer, Martin Waukazoo warmly joked with a grand-parent of scholars in the room, "I want to acknowledge a special person—Donnie Arnold, get up here, young man." Donnie spoke of how proud he feels of both of his grandchildren who are scholarship recipients and headed toward a bright future.

Our students in the 7Generations scholarship community serve as an example of the breathtaking resilience our community contains. The diversity of the students in this cohort is similar to that of a blanket weaving: colorful, different, yet cohesive and woven together to make a future filled with healing and hope. Some students are the first in their family to attend college. Some have been formerly incarcerated and rebuilt their lives. Some study engineering and science avidly. Some are studying nursing at the graduate level. Some are future accountants. Some have families that have been here since the beginning—our Native Californians. Some are athletic super-stars. Some are studying acting and theater. Many have immediate family who have all been affected by the boarding school history outlined so eloquently by Helen. All are breaking and redesigning cycles. Our Chief Administrative Officer, Natalie Aguilera, recalled coaching some of the 7Generations Scholarship students in soccer when they were kids—and is now seeing them off as they attend higher education as young adults. Our community is containing itself and expanding collectively. We are doing something right. Like constellations in the night sky, we are all connected by our innate spirit to keep moving, keep growing and build anew. Congratulations to the students and to our community for continuing to thrive and plant seeds for the next generations.