

# Programs work together and quietly save lives



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Aaniin Anishnaabek, first, I thank everyone who works so hard to make the elder's and children's Christmas parties such huge successes! CHI-MIIGWETCH! You do fantastic jobs and bring much happiness!

I am so proud of the good work our tribe does to help our people. We have so many good people working diligently, pouring their hearts into all they do. From our biggest business to our smallest program, I am genuinely touched by the dedication of all who serve. This month, I would like to take a moment and focus on the people and programs I had the privilege to directly work with throughout the entire year: The Advocacy Resource Center, our Tribal Drug Court Program and the Legal Department in support of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). During 2015, I plan to share more with you about other programs as well, but I wanted to start with these first because they allowed me to either be directly involved or provided guidance I needed; and, second, because these programs work quietly SAVING PEOPLES LIVES. I have witnessed the difference these programs have made and want to acknowledge that they not only changed the lives of the people they served,

but mine as well.

Under of Jami Moran, the ARC is a safe-haven for victims of crime. Her staff is dedicated to providing a wide variety of services to victims of crime with a special focus on women and children in abusive relationships. They provide advocacy and support to our people as well as operating the Lodge of Bravery (a domestic violence shelter). I have worked with Jami and her staff this year and was so impressed by the fine work they are doing. They assist victims of crime with the management of trauma and with resolution of victimization. From crime victim compensation applications, personal protection orders, as well as help understanding and navigating the criminal justice systems, the ARC is keeping our people safe and saving lives. Over the course of this year, I have had tribal members reach out to me as a board member for help, and because of the ARC, I know that they are safe.

The Sault Tribe Drug Court is another service saving people's lives. In short, Drug Court allows eligible drug-addicted people to pursue treatment for their addictions and learn to live clean and sober lives (rather than the more traditional justice system case processing). But it is hard work, not just for the participant but for the Drug Court Team. Our team, led by Judge Jocelyn Fabry, includes counselors, traditional medicine people, police officers, specialists, lawyers and people from the recovering community. It is an intensive program, but it works! Participants are:

- "Provided with intensive treatment and other services they require to get and stay clean and sober;
- Held accountable by the Drug Court judge for meeting their obligations to the court, society, themselves and their families;

- Regularly and randomly tested for drug use;
- Required to appear in court frequently so that the judge may review their progress; and
- Rewarded for doing well or sanctioned when they do not live up to their obligations."

Drug courts exist all over the country. In their 20-year existence, "there has been more research published on the effects of drug courts than on virtually all other criminal justice programs combined. Research shows that drug courts work better than jail or prison and better than probation and treatment alone. Drug courts reduce drug use and crime and are more cost effective than any other proven criminal justice strategy."

Recognizing that nothing works 100 percent of the time, I am pleased by what I have seen in our Drug Court. As a member of the team, we have helped families stay together. We've reunited parents with their children. We've held participants accountable, imposed sanctions when needed and rewards when deserved. I've seen personal growth in individuals who had practically given up, but because of the support from the Drug Court team, did not quit. I've watched with tears in my eyes, as families gathered together at graduations, standing with their loved ones who have been armed with tools, knowledge, support and most importantly pride that they are living free from drugs and alcohol. As one participant said, "Drug Court saved my life."

Over the past two years I have been working on a new area that will save people's lives, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Currently, our tribe does not have jurisdiction over non-tribal people who commit acts of violence on our land. If a non-Indian beats, rapes or even kills one of our people, we have to rely on the federal government

to prosecute and bring justice to our tribe. Across the country, many, many cases are simply not pursued — the non-Indian perpetrators run free and the victims are left to put the pieces of their lives back together with no justice. VAWA can change that.

"Under the new law, a non-Indian defendant would have the right to a jury trial (in a tribal court) that is drawn from a cross-section of the community and doesn't systematically exclude non-Indians or other distinctive groups. The protections would equal those in state or federal court, including the right to a public defender, a judge who is licensed to practice law, a recording of the proceedings and published laws and rules of criminal procedure."

Our tribe has not yet adopted VAWA. However, I believe that being a sovereign nation brings with it a responsibility to protect our people. Of course, there are costs to be considered and some may believe the cost is too high. To them I would ask, "What if it were your daughter or granddaughter? What would you be willing to pay then? Could you live with the knowledge that the person who brutalized your loved one is walking around free? Free to do it again?" I know what my answer would be.

I and members of the legal department have been attending free trainings from the Department of Justice to help our tribe make an informed decision to implement VAWA. There is much work yet to do. Codes need to be changed, processes need to be developed, and the tribal board of directors need to say yes.

VAWA is another opportunity to save lives, and I pray that one day we will not have to hope that the feds will do something about a violent crime committed on our land. I pray the day will come when we will exercise our sovereignty, adopt VAWA and protect

our people in every way that we can.

As I said earlier in this article, we have many people and programs working hard to make life better for our people, and I am grateful to them all. I hope no one is offended that I did not include more at this time, but I am limited by space. This is only the beginning and I will be recognizing more of the good that is being done in future articles. Our members everywhere deserve to know about the good things being done by their tribe and the people doing the work deserve the recognition for their accomplishments, dedication and loyalty.

Finally, I would like to say miigwetch to all of our people, and especially to those who chose me to serve. In addition to all of the board meetings, workshops, budget reviews and other requirements of the office, I have been blessed to have the opportunity to work hands on and know that I have made a difference. I have been able to quietly find those who need help the most and have helped them. To do so makes my heart sing and makes all of the negativity of politics absolutely worth it! I would like to make one more "shout out" to the elder (I don't have permission to share her name), who donated a huge bag of beads and craft materials to the children. CHI-MIIGWETCH! Kid's culture class is going to be even better now!

Stay safe and warm everyone. Be kind to one another and remember those who are hurting. Anishnaabe gagige (Anishnaabe for always), and Shawindekaa (Many blessings).

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