



# Maine-Wabanaki REACH

Newsletter  
Winter 2019

## New and Good

Maine-Wabanaki REACH is starting 2019 in a good way. As you know, in 2018 we established a Board of Directors, incorporated, and submitted its 501c3 application to the IRS. Securing strong leadership in an Executive Director was the next important step for our organization.

The Board is filled with gratitude as we let you know that we offered Maria Girouard the current half-time position of REACH Executive Director...and we are even more excited to announce that she said yes! Maria will be blending her time to assume the leadership role of Director while continuing to design and implement health and wellness programs and resources. With her strong relationships and deep community connections, Maria will reinforce REACH's collaboration and partnerships. She will oversee the strategic direction of the organization, development of resources to support programming, and the implementation of REACH priorities.

Maria's background and experience make her an ideal person to fill this needed leadership role. Maria has served as the Health and Wellness Coordinator for REACH since 2012. She is a member of Penobscot Nation, longstanding community organizer, and activist of environmental and social justice. Maria is an historian with a master's degree in history from the University of Maine and expertise in the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act. She is a founder of The Peoples' Garden at Penobscot Nation. Whether there or in other garden spots, Maria dedicates hours and love of the earth to community gardening. Maria is also a 2015 recipient of the prestigious Maryann Hartman Award for her advocacy work on preserving the rights and cultural heritage of Penobscot Nation.

REACH seeks to rejuvenate the spirit that is rooted in land, ceremony, identity and relationships. We support Wabanaki people in addressing their communities' needs and aspirations. We engage Maine people to acknowledge the full truth of the past, embrace the full truth of the present and commit to creating a just future, no matter what obstacles are in our path. You may recall Maria articulating this so beautifully when she spoke at the Genocide and ME event in 2013. "Many" Maria said "believe we are entering the time of the great healing now. But the great healing is not a spectator sport. It's a critical call to action. All peoples, of all races and religions must come together and work for the good of all. And in order for any change or healing to take place the truth must be told, and be received by compassionate ears."

We are fortunate to have Maria assuming the Executive Director position, strengthening REACH's capacity to fulfill our role and responsibility.

REACH Board, Staff, and Volunteers

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## Wellness in Wabanaki Communities

Winter has traditionally been a time for storytelling in Wabanaki communities. Stories are vital to how we understand the world and live our lives as Native peoples. Our creation stories, traditional stories that guide and teach right from wrong, stories that entertain and reinforce values, and our own personal stories are all important to our way of knowing and being.

Wabanaki people traditionally gathered in Circle to come together, to meditate, and to share those stories crucial to our existence. It is the stories shared in Circles that enrich the process –

“not through lecturing or giving advice or telling others what to do but through sharing stories of struggle, pain, joy, despair, and triumph. Personal narratives are the source of insight and wisdom in Circles.”

~Kay Pranis *The Little Book of Circle Processes*.

A Talking Circle involves people sitting together in a circle, taking turns expressing their thoughts and feelings often times on a particular topic or issue. Many times a small tangible item is used as a talking piece that is held by the person who is speaking while all others listen. Talking circles have been used historically as a way of bringing people together to listen, learn, and brainstorm ways forward and more recently they have been used to facilitate healing in both Native and non-Native communities.

“Storytelling strengthens a sense of connectedness, fosters self-reflection, and empowers participants.” A special aspect of sharing in the form of storytelling is that it shifts how we listen. Storytelling uses a different kind of listening where “the body relaxes, settles back, is more open and less anxious. We take in the story before screening the content.” When information is delivered in a more lectured format, we “immediately engage a screening device to determine whether we agree or disagree.”

~Kay Pranis *The Little Book of Circle Processes*.

While Talking Circles are the most common, there are many other types of Circles, each with a specific purpose. REACH wellness work in Wabanaki communities includes offering Restorative Circles in community and Peace and Healing Circles with Native inmates in Maine’s prisons. REACH Circle Facilitators include Katie Tomer, Sandra Bassett, Roger Paul, Alivia Moore, Andrea Francis, and myself.

Just coming together to sit in Circle is restorative because of the connection humans innately desire. There is a certain excitement and anticipation as each looks around the Circle to see who else is there and a sense of safety and familiarity. People participating in Circles report a sense of balance being restored, the light feeling of getting things off their chest, and appreciation in being heard. When asked what it is about Circles that keeps folks coming back, one participant in REACH’s Restorative Circles simply stated, “I feel a sense of belonging.” An inmate who participates in REACH’s Peace and Healing Circles reports, “It makes me a happier person, helps me to look at life differently and focus on the beauty of the Earth outside these brick walls... and I feel free, even though I am not.”

Maria Girouard  
Executive Director/Wabanaki Wellness Coordinator



For more information about REACH Circles and hosting Circle in your tribal community, contact Maria at 852-2541 or [maria@mainewabanakireach.org](mailto:maria@mainewabanakireach.org)



## Decolonization with Our Whole Selves Next Steps in Non-Native Communities

After I facilitate a REACH program, often participants' comments swirl in my head. "I knew I needed to come to terms with my family history of harm to Native Americans. I did not expect to find a path here in Maine. But thanks to the work of Wabanaki people and REACH, here I am. I have made a start. And now I feel ready to find out what will be the next step." I have carried these thoughts with me thinking both how good it is to know where one is and how challenging to figure out what is next. For some people the next step is to learn more on their own. For others, the next step is to organize REACH program in their community or to make a donation to keep REACH rolling. Others become involved in work to support Wabanaki self-determination.

Why is figuring out what comes next challenging for non-Native people? One reason is we are not sure how to take ourselves out of colonizing roles because colonization is foundational to our identity as Americans. Another reason is the dominant culture often defines people and actions as good or bad. Many people focus a lot on being good people doing good things. As beginners at decolonization, we worry that our mistakes will cause more harm.

In its full day workshop, REACH offers some guidance for taking action toward decolonization. The first suggested action is to learn your own story asking yourself: *who are my people and where am I from?* None of our people were all good or bad, all victims or all perpetrators. This learning of our own peoples allows us to feel the strengths of our ancestors and learn from their challenges while acknowledging our responsibility to our descendants. We can place our stories in the greater truth of the territory where we live and the complicated relationships of oppression, resistance, privilege, and colonization. Knowing who we are, we can approach decolonization with our whole selves. We will still be beginners and will still make mistakes, but we will also be ready to learn from those mistakes.

The second suggested action is continued learning about the territories where we live. REACH is ready to support this learning in community. This past summer and fall so many communities invited us in - faith communities, schools, community centers, libraries, theaters, colleges, and town halls. I am honored to be one of the facilitators to share learning and questions as together we take next steps in decolonization.

A comment I hear a lot is: "I can't believe I grew up here in Maine and I never knew this history" usually said with anger. I hear it from 15 year olds and 80 year olds, people who grew up in Aroostook, and people from the Portland suburbs. Next step: "Now we know so what will we do?"

Barbara Kates, Maine Community Organizer



For more information about programs in Maine communities check [mainewabanakireach.org/events](http://mainewabanakireach.org/events), sign up on the email list, and like our Facebook page. To explore organizing a program for your community, contact [barbara@mainewabanakireach.org](mailto:barbara@mainewabanakireach.org).



# The Truth Commission and Beyond

We continue an ongoing discussion about what is happening and what needs to happen in relation to the roadmap towards truth, healing, and change that was provided to Mainers in the fourteen recommendations contained in *Beyond the Mandate: Continuing the Conversation*, the final report of the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission



The Commission called for the honoring of *Wabanaki choices to support healing* and celebrating *the cultural resurgence* within Wabanaki communities and programs. There is much to celebrate here – in the work that REACH has undertaken in neighborhoods, prisons, schools, faith communities, workplaces, universities; and in civic, political, environmental and peace and justice groups.

In Wabanaki communities, REACH offers wellness workshops, presentations, and community events focused on restorative practices through peace and healing circles. Each year REACH organizes a Wabanaki Wellness Gathering with speakers, activities, and workshops that promote resilience and healing through learning, laughter, and being together. In the coming year, REACH is working to organize such a Wellness Gathering for Wabanaki community members living in southern Maine to reclaim space, promote community dialogue, learn, and engage in ceremony and celebration together.

In correctional facilities across the state, REACH brings holistic peace and healing circles to engage Wabanaki inmates (men and women) in a restorative experience. The circles provide spiritual nourishment through ceremony and tradition. They are also educational, teaching history, language, meditation, self-connection, and self-soothing strategies.

To ensure that the work of REACH stays focused on decolonization and restoration, we ask ourselves this fundamental guiding question when we are undertaking any activity: “How will this benefit Wabanaki people?” You can be sure that any donation or honorarium we receive goes to support programming in for Wabanaki people. Thank you for your ongoing support.

Penthea Burns, REACH Board Co-Chair



## Protect the Children ~ Protect ICWA

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 is considered the “Gold Standard” in child welfare policy and practice. Its purpose is to protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian Tribes and families.

On October 4, 2018, Judge Reed O'Connor in the Northern District of Texas Federal Court issued his decision in *Brackeen (Texas) v. Zinke*, ruling that ICWA is unconstitutional on several grounds claiming that ICWA is a race-based law that violates the Equal Protection Clause. Groups behind this litigation have been trying for years to dismantle ICWA, not because of genuine concern for children, but as a way to dismantle the very existence of tribes and tribal sovereignty. If this ruling is upheld through appeal, and tribes are considered races and not distinct, sovereign Nations, then the Federal Government will be exempt from their trust responsibility, tribal trust lands will not be preserved, and tribal children will no longer be protected.

REACH supports the Tribal-State ICWA Workgroup in their efforts toward best child welfare policy and practice with native children in Maine and we urge all Mainers to learn about and stay updated on this very crucial case. We are pleased that the Maine Attorney General’s Office has filed an amicus brief in support of upholding ICWA.

## Woliwon ~ Woliwoni ~ Walalin ~ Thank You

Thank you to the many people who volunteered with Maine-Wabanaki REACH. We hope we have included everyone here, but if we missed you, know you are part of great work!

Christopher Beach  
Julie Beckford  
Simon Beckford  
Ericka Bjorum  
Ellen Booraem  
Rocky Coastlines  
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Margy Dowzer  
Mary Therese Duffy  
Jonathan Falk  
Andrea Francis  
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Carla Hunt  
Carie Johnsen  
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George Mason  
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Deb Soule  
Karin Spitfire  
Linda Swackhamer  
Sally Walker Madore  
Heather Westleigh



Thank you to the groups who hosted REACH events in their communities in 2018:

Auburn Unitarian Universalist Church  
Bates College  
Belfast Area Friends Meeting  
Belfast community members & Belfast Free Library  
Blue Hill Library  
Bowdoin College students  
Bowdoin College Orientation program  
Calais High School Passamaquoddy language class  
Camden Film Festival  
Cheverus High School  
Chewonki School  
Colby College Four Winds Native American Alliance & Native Feminism class  
Congregation Beth El, Bangor  
Criterion Theater & Abbe Museum  
Damariscotta community members, Lincoln Theater, & Midcoast Friends Meeting Peace Center  
First Light Learning Journey  
Frontier Theater  
Holocaust and Human Rights Center  
Husson College  
Kittery Advocates for All & Kittery Star Theater  
Maine Democratic Party  
Maine Youth Action Network  
Mano en Mano  
Midcoast Indigenous Awareness Group & Brunswick Curtis Library  
Monroe community members  
Old Town Middle School  
Peace and Justice Center of Eastern Maine & Penobscot Theatre  
Portland Museum of Art  
Portland Public Schools  
Saco Thornton Academy Civil Rights Team  
Sierra Club – Kennebunk  
Southern Maine Conservation Coalition & Portland Public Library  
Southern Maine Workers Center  
Stonington Opera House  
Unitarian Universalist Church Bangor  
Unitarian Universalist Meeting House Pittsfield  
University of Maine Decolonizing UMaine, Diversity Leadership Institute & Psychology Department  
University of Maine at Machias  
University of Southern Maine  
UNUM