



Maine-Wabanaki REACH

Newsletter
Summer 2017

Decolonization - A Shift in Focus for Mainers

Decolonization for Maine people and communities is an ongoing practice with the goal that it will support Wabanaki self-determination. It begins by understanding and acknowledging the truth of colonization and our history and current relationships. Current relationships mean our relationships with all things: other individuals, other groups of people, other living things, ecosystems, and all things in the Universe. Colonization is not only an historical concept related to European arrival and governmental relations. It is a current and active internalized system that defines all things (i.e., children, citizenship, rights, land, water, etc.) as resources that exist for the benefit of some through the oppression and harm of others, particularly Indigenous people. It supports powerful individuals and organizations to take as much as they want without concern for others who are affected now and in the future.

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Decolonization is personal and grounded in community. It asks us to look at our lives differently, unlearn, and learn again as we peel back the layers of systemic oppression. Within that we acknowledge how we benefit from the illegal settlement of Indigenous peoples' land and the unjust appropriation of their livelihoods and culture. It is painful and humbling and necessary to recognize these impacts, but we do so in order to take responsibility for our own ongoing complicity in colonialism. Decolonization requires "rebooting" our personal operating systems to get rid of all the viruses and malware that have attached themselves over the years through patriarchy, racism, privilege, colonization, micro-aggressions etc.

Through this learning we recognize that it is our interconnectedness (through history and now and into the future) that will create change and help us all thrive. Decolonization embraces a commitment to creating a just future, with a peaceful and healthy world. We are bound together, approaching our relationships with humility, kindness, generosity, and reciprocity not only for today, but holding the long view of the future.

We need to not only change our personal relationships but also the systems that support continued colonization. As we grow together we must change our community institutions – faith, business, health, education, government, social and more. Whatever their role and purpose, these organizations must participate in decolonization and end the oppression of Indigenous people.

As we work in Maine communities, we are mindful that Wabanaki people are at the center of this work. To be successful, we need to de-center ourselves and stop taking more than our share of space and time and attention. We must be aware that seeking guidance must be weighed against the very real possibility of further burdening Indigenous people with our questions and needs. We need to step out of our cultural safety that sorts the world in binaries: good-bad, colonizer-colonized, violence-peace, ill-healthy, sad-happy. We need to learn a way of thinking that incorporates all the shades of pain, beauty and truth that make up history. Recognizing all these experiences and interconnections will guide our practice of decolonization that will allow space and support the change that Wabanaki communities will create for themselves. ~ REACH Maine Organizing Team

Wabanaki Health, Wellness, and Self Determination

Healing does not happen in solitude. We all need compassionate support. REACH believes in the importance and power of coming together as community.

On a perfect Spring day in May, in collaboration with the Penobscot Nation Cultural & Historic Preservation Department and the People's Garden of Indian Island, we held an informal Meet & Greet for visiting guest Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer.

Aligning with the vision for the People's Garden as a place where community gathers, learns, and can grow together, we spent the afternoon visiting, eating, drumming, singing, and sharing stories.

Carol Dana, Penobscot Language Master, led us through a Penobscot language lesson of garden-related words as we sat around the fire we built together.

We also had quite a work party, rolling up our sleeves to get our hands dirty in the community garden and looking for wild edibles and medicinal plants. It was healing to spend time at the garden in conversation with Robin and each other.



In the Passamaquoddy community of Sipayik, we have been supporting the Sipayik Youth Council, the next generation of community leaders. At their last meeting, the Youth Council engaged in a discussion about what leadership means and agreed that doing more for Veterans and Elders shows leadership. With Native American Veteran's Day approaching on June 21st the youth decided to host a supper to honor and acknowledge the Veterans. The event was a great success and the room was packed. The youth served pans and pans of lasagna, macaroni and cheese, and spaghetti, showing that they are getting to be quite the experts in the kitchen. This was the second supper hosted by the youth for their community; they also hosted a community supper last Thanksgiving Day.

Save the date! Plans are already underway for our 4th annual Wabanaki Wellness Gathering scheduled for Monday October 9 and Tuesday October 10 in the Passamaquoddy community of Sipayik. Our theme for this year's gathering is Art, Music, and Healing and we would be open to hearing from anyone who might have an art or music related workshop to offer. Please direct inquiries regarding the annual gathering to Maria Girouard at (207) 852-2541 or maria@mainewabanakireach.org

Maine Community Organizing

We are now in our third year of educating Maine communities. In typical REACH fashion, we both celebrate our success and at the same time are forced to dig deeper.

Over the recent months we have developed a clear understanding that our role is learning and pursuing a path of decolonization through education within our own communities and institutional structures. This is where we are focused even as we are poised to ally with Wabanaki people if we are asked to do so. At REACH events across the state, we continue to educate hundreds of people about our colonizing history and relationships. We encourage participants to share their learning in their own communities. And they are. Mainers are showing up at political meetings, the state legislature, faith communities, colleges, and environmental activist events, as well as utilizing social networking and news media outlets. They are speaking the truth about continuing oppression and are engaging their neighbors to join them as students of decolonization and supporters of Wabanaki initiatives. REACH is honored to be part of this education that nourishes Mainers capacity to create change on many levels.

At our May REACH Convening of almost one hundred participants, we could feel the momentum building. For example, people on university and other school campuses shared how they advocate for decolonization in curriculum and administration. Writers discussed how to frame their stories. In another initiative, faith leaders have designed workshops for other faith leaders. Environmental activists are hosting the REACH Workshop and bringing their learning back to their organizations. Most recently we were pleased to be with the Sierra Club and Avena Botanicals.

With a mainly volunteer staff, REACH is currently re-organizing its Maine work to provide sustainable, diverse learning focused on decolonization. Perhaps you have questions about the work. Here are some answers to frequently asked questions:

- **How do I begin to explore decolonization?** REACH offers online information and perspectives through the blog and Facebook. Later this year, we will add listings of online sources for continued learning.
- **How do I introduce my community (or workplace or organization) to learning the history of colonization?** REACH welcomes discussions about how to educate communities. For years we have provided a stimulating speaking/photo/film presentation. This year, REACH is offering a two-hour interactive learning exercise where everyone participates in the telling of our history.
- **How do I jump start my learning and dig in?** REACH offers full day workshops. These workshops begin with history and continue to learn about privilege and decolonization. Contact us if you and your local organization would like to schedule and help organize a workshop.
- **How do I continue learning beyond the workshop?** REACH has a curriculum for monthly meetings and assists in organizing discussion groups. These have been well received and we will soon organize new discussion groups to begin in early fall of 2017.

Most of REACH work is accomplished by volunteers and we welcome your interest in helping out. You can complete a volunteer form by emailing Barbara@mainewabanakireach.org



Restorative Justice and Healing

The Wabanaki cultural value of compassion is a cornerstone to our restorative justice effort. Our work in Maine's prisons has flourished as we continue to engage native men and women in holistic healing circles. We just completed the Spring session of circles and plan to offer a Fall session.

The Wabanaki Restorative Justice project has expanded to include an educational initiative for our tribal communities. We held three regional educational events. One last fall at the Aroostook Band of Micmacs with the Aroostook County Triage Team, another in January at the Wabanaki Cultural Center in Calais, and the final in March at the Penobscot Nation Tribal Court. We presented information about mass incarceration, the disproportionate rate of Native people in the criminal justice system, root causes, and the philosophy and practices of restorative justice, discussing how it may be used in our tribal communities.

A core group of people have coalesced from each region who are willing to help move forward and actualize the idea of restorative justice for tribal communities. Follow up from these regional events include further education, presentations, and discussion. Our long term vision of restorative justice for Wabanaki people includes ongoing education and healing circles that offer safe and supportive space to listen, share and reflect. of the one who caused the harm and those impacted, including the community.



Woliwon ♦ Woliwoni ♦ Walalin ♦ Thank You

Thank you to the many people who made our work in Maine and Wabanaki communities possible over the last six months by giving their money, time, energy, space and resources. We are so grateful for the many monetary donations we receive every week and wish we could acknowledge each one individually and publicly because every donation makes a big difference.

Thank you to the following who made in-kind donations of space and resources this year: University of Maine Orono; University of Maine Farmington; Margaret Chase Smith Library; Food and Medicine; Peace and Justice Center of Eastern Maine; University of Maine at Machias; University of Southern Maine; Camden Library; University of Maine Augusta; Church of Universal Fellowship (Orono); Friends Meeting House (Portland); Unitarian-Universalist Church (Bangor); Unitarian-Universalist Community Church of Augusta; Allen Avenue Unitarian-Universalist Church; the Winthrop Friends Meeting; Bates College; the BTS Center; Portland Friends School; Lubec Memorial Library; the Holocaust and Human Rights Center; Avena Botanicals; Calais Free Library; AFSC Wabanaki Program; the Sipayik Boys and Girls Club; Phoenix Farms; Robin Farrin Photography; Penobscot Nation Cultural and Historic Preservation Department; and The People's Garden.

Thank you so much to the hundred or so people who volunteered during the past six months. What a wonderful foundation of support. Volunteers participated in committees to raise funds, and design the discussion groups, the Decolonizing Faith workshops, and the Convening. Volunteers brought food to events, arranged locations and outreach in their communities and helped us make connections to leaders who then organized events in their communities. Volunteers presented, read, facilitated discussion, videoed and photographed at our events, and created beautiful art work to support our work. This all fills the entire REACH community with gratitude.