



# Maine-Wabanaki REACH

Newsletter  
Winter 2017

## Planting Seeds of Decolonization

Maine Wabanaki REACH is locally and organically grown. We began as a collaboration of Wabanaki and Maine child welfare workers and we have developed into a broader network of Wabanaki and Maine people. We began providing educational programs to offer a context for the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Quickly communities began to ask for more; more information, more understanding of how to move forward, and more time in community working together. One project led to another. Responding to communities created new opportunities that were as varied as the communities are.

### In this issue:

Wabanaki Wellness	2
Maine Organizing	3
Restorative Justice	4

In Wabanaki communities, REACH supports gatherings where people share their knowledge, skills and experience. In Maine State prisons, we offer healing circles for Wabanaki prisoners. In Maine communities, we offer workshops and presentations to help Mainers understand the relationship of Maine and tribal peoples and consider how to move toward a new relationship. Even as we make room for learning that is specific to communities, we are creating opportunities for us all to learn together with great speakers and interactive events.

Although our strategies may change, our goal has been constant: to support Wabanaki self-determination. Our model is fair trade. Through our interactions with you all, we adapt our programming. This flexibility has provided room for wonderful creativity and mixing of skills as reflected in the variety of projects and collaborations such as restorative justice work, healing work with native herbs and the Exploring Wabanaki Maine History – an interactive learning exercise.

One of the great pleasures of our work is to see communities move forward. It is like sharing seeds and then watching a completely new garden grow. Healing work and medicinal gardens, film showings and study groups, youth leadership and history study – all around Wabanaki and Maine people are inviting their community to learn with them. Inspired after a REACH program, they are bringing together their own great skills and connections to create change in their communities.

In 2017, there were over 1800 participants in REACH learning and healing activities. We are glad we had time with so many of you and we look forward to more. Our motto has been truth, healing, and change. In 2018, we will continue this work with particular focus on how decolonization offers us the framework for change and can guide us in taking action. Do you want REACH's help to work towards truth, healing, and change in your community? Do you want to know what we are up to near you? Let us know. You can reach us through our website [www.mainewabanakireach.org](http://www.mainewabanakireach.org).

## Wabanaki Health, Wellness, and Self Determination

Capacitar, meaning, “to empower”.

The health and wellness work of Maine-Wabanaki REACH focuses on understanding intergenerational trauma, how trauma becomes trapped in our bodies, and healthy ways to release that trauma. Empowerment and self-care is an important part of the healing journey. During our 4th annual Wabanaki Wellness Gathering held in the Passamaquoddy community of Sipayik, a Capacitar-style resiliency workshop was offered teaching simple techniques that lead to immediate well-being.

Capacitar is a Spanish verb meaning, “to empower.” A Capacitar-style resiliency workshop is based on healing tools and techniques compiled by an organization called Capacitar International that demonstrate how our bodies possess natural capacities to heal. We are simply uncovering what our bodies already naturally know. The act of sighing is a good example. When we sigh, we may be signaling our frustration or impatience however Capacitar teaches us that a sigh is our body's natural mechanism for releasing stress or anxiety. Deeply inhaling and hearing the sound of its release is a beneficial signal to our bodies. Studies show that the simple act of sighing signals a reset button to our respiratory systems and calms us.

Capacitar-style exercises are body-based healing practices that foster relief from pent-up trauma, anxiety and stress which may be stored in our bodies. Exercises include techniques such as mindful breathing, fingerholds, t'ai chi movements, acupressure and Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT, otherwise known as “tapping”). Although Susan Coopersmith led the Capacitar-style workshop at the Wellness Gathering, a wonderful thing about this practice is that anyone can do it at home whenever needed. Knowledge of Capacitar-style techniques are freely shared, empowering people to know and trust in the needs of their own bodies - experts are not required.

Since 2014, REACH has offered workshops on Capacitar-style techniques in four Wabanaki communities. We are eager to continue passing along this knowledge and are willing to circle back to tribal communities to offer a second round of workshops. To host a “Tools and Techniques for Self-Healing” workshop in your tribal community or for your tribal organization, contact Maria at [maria@mainewabanakireach.org](mailto:maria@mainewabanakireach.org).



Photo credit: Robin Farrin

Learn more about Capacitar International, Healing Ourselves, Healing our World, and download the Emergency Response Tool Kit at [www.capacitar.org](http://www.capacitar.org)

## Maine Community Organizing – Higher Education

REACH provides presentations and workshops across Maine, including in institutions of higher education for faculty, staff, and students. Colleges and universities are the sites of thinking, research, learning, and creative expression. They also have been the generators of knowledge – including that which is colonized. However, there is greater movement afoot for Maine colleges and universities to generate decolonized knowledge.

Faculty, staff, and students engaged in REACH educational programs seek to correct the erroneous history we all have been taught, exposing present-day oppression, and creating a more just history for our grandchildren. Some have been working to create positive change long before REACH, while others are just beginning their journey to learn about decolonization.

Maine institutions of higher learning have history and present reality to acknowledge and grapple with from the theft of Wabanaki land and massacre of Wabanaki people to conflicts when academic theories contribute to the continued colonial oppression of Native people. Repairing those harms can begin by ensuring culturally grounded support for Native students, by recruiting and retaining Native faculty and staff, by developing decolonized coursework, by the University of Maine system reinstating the Native American Tuition Waiver and Scholarship Program as it was intended, and by other colleges creating tuition waiver programs for Native students.

U-Maine campuses (UMA, UMM, UMO, USM, and UMPI), Bates, Colby, Bowdoin, and other schools are collaborating with REACH to host learning experiences about colonization and decolonization. Ongoing groups at UMO and USM focus on transforming their institutions by learning about the history and current reality of tribal-state relations, creating greater capacity to be truth tellers about the adverse impacts of colonial oppression on Native communities, and building supports to improve Native students' experience and increase their recruitment, retention, and academic success.

Maine colleges and universities are recognizing their responsibility for strengthening higher education for the benefit of Native students and Wabanaki communities. They are starting with learning about and understanding the history that brought us to this point, acknowledging the harms they can repair, and leveraging their collective strengths and privileges to begin creating change by:

- Supporting new and ongoing Native American student groups;
- Reviewing (and hopefully reversing) the changes made in 2012 to the Native American Tuition Waiver and Scholarship Program;
- Creating dedicated residence hall space for Native students;
- Establishing dedicated meeting space for Native student groups;
- Making Wabanaki language class accessible to other UM campuses through distance technology;
- Networking between colleges and universities to share these innovations.



## Restorative Justice in Community

REACH continues to put forth the idea of restorative justice and other restorative practices in tribal communities. Restorative Justice is a philosophy, process, and practice rooted in indigenous cultural values and focused on making things right-on repairing harm. These practices are valuable tools in mediating conflict and creating safe, peaceful spaces of mutual respect and compassion.

We held three regional restorative justice educational events with tribal community audiences. The discussion at these forums was rich and community members offered two suggestions for us in this work: provide more education about restorative justice and engage with each of the schools. We have been moved by the enthusiasm of participants when brainstorming the possibilities that restorative practices might bring to our tribal schools. In June, we presented to the Joint School Committee at their annual meeting in Bar Harbor and will visit Indian Island School Committee for further dialogue in January.

We are excited about the traveling Restorative Justice Exhibit we have created and the many ways we can use it to educate about what restorative justice is, what it is not, and how it aligns with Wabanaki values. The 8-panel display also includes information about how Native Americans experience the highest disproportionate rate of incarceration. To help deliver our message we used paintings created and donated by a Native inmate who participates in the healing circles we offer at the prisons. We debuted the exhibit at our annual Wabanaki Wellness Gathering in Sipayik and are currently seeking venues in Wabanaki communities to display the exhibit and continue dialogue about restorative practices. Conflict in our communities is inevitable. How we deal with it is a choice.

We are also in the process of creating another exhibit geared toward non-Native people that will be used in venues across Maine to educate about history, disproportionate rates of incarceration, the prison industrial complex, restorative justice and ways to engage with truth, healing and change.



### Song of the Stars – Passamaquoddy

We are the stars which sing.  
We sing with our light.  
We are the birds of fire  
We fly across the heaven,  
Our light is a star.

We make a road for Spirits,  
A road for the Great Spirit.  
Among us are three hunters  
Who chase a bear:

There never was a time  
When they were not hunting;  
We look down on the mountains.  
This is the Song of the mountains.

L. & P.



Photo credit: James E. Francis Sr.