



## CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE

*Recognizing and Encouraging Native American Youth Creating Positive Change*

The Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, created by former US Senator Byron Dorgan with \$1 million from his excess campaign funds, is dedicated to improving the lives of Native American youth. The Center is aimed at bringing greater national attention to the issues facing Native youth through communication, policy development and advocacy. To help shine a spotlight on inspirational stories and promote hope in Indian Country, the Center launched a new initiative in November 2012 - **Champions for Change**.

### CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE PROGRAM

The Champions for Change (CFC) program recognizes and encourages inspirational Native American youth (ages 14 to 24) working in their tribal or urban Indian communities to promote hope and make a positive impact. Champions include individuals who initiate programs, hold events, or engage in other efforts to improve the lives of their peers, communities, and Indian Country as a whole.

The Center announced the CFC program during November 2012's Native American Heritage Month and five finalists were selected and recognized through a series of events and media attention in March 2013 in Washington, DC. The CFC program is an annual invitation for Native American youth to submit a story in written or video form about how they are making a positive impact. *CFC program submission categories include:*

- Health (including youth suicide prevention; bereavement, grief, and healing; and substance and alcohol abuse prevention)
- Sports, Nutrition or Wellness
- Education, Mentorship or Afterschool Programs;
- Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Building Healthy Relationships and Peer Relationships
- Cultural Preservation and Native Languages;
- Anti-Bullying and Personal Empowerment
- Self-Expression through Arts and Crafts
- Emerging Leadership in Government Service
- Economic and Community Development

### CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE RECOGNITION

The five Champions for Change finalists are recognized by the Center for Native American Youth in the following ways:

- Certificate of recognition and medal;
- Travel with a chaperone to Washington, DC for a series of national recognition events;
- Opportunity to participate in a mentorship coordinated by the Center;
- Invitation to serve a two-year term on the **Center's Youth Advisory Board**; and
- Eligible for consideration for a **future visit from a member of the Center's board of advisors** to their home community to share more about their initiative for change.



Visit the Center's website at [www.cnay.org](http://www.cnay.org) or contact us at [cnayinfo@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:cnayinfo@aspeninstitute.org) or (202) 736-2905 to learn more about the CFC program.



The Champions for Change (CFC) program at the Center for Native American Youth, inspired by a 2011 White House initiative, recognizes and encourages inspirational Native youth working in their tribal or urban Indian communities to promote hope and make a positive impact. Please see abbreviated biographies below for our 2013 inaugural Champions for Change class. Visit [www.cnay.org](http://www.cnay.org) to learn more about the CFC program and the upcoming application process.

## CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE: 2013 INAGURAL CLASS



**Dahkota Brown, Wilton Miwok Tribe**  
**Age: 15; Hometown: Jackson, California**

Dahkota started his own peer-to-peer study group called NERDS (Native Education Raising Dedicated Students). Dahkota works with local high schools and middle schools to help Native American students better connect with and relate to lessons. Shortly after his CFC recognition, Dahkota received funding to support NERDS for the next year, and he was invited to present on his efforts at the United Way's Day of Action.



**Cierra Fields, Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma**  
**Age: 14; Hometown: Fort Gibson, Oklahoma**

Cierra is a melanoma cancer survivor and now volunteers her time to travel across the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma to promote healthy lifestyles in order to reduce the risk of cancer. To help share her message, Cierra has collaborated with the Cherokee Nation Comprehensive Cancer Control Program, Mayo Clinic, Circle of Hope, St. Francis Children's Hospital, and the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life.



**Joaquin Gallegos, Jicarilla Apache Nation & Pueblo of Santa Ana**  
**Age: 23; Hometown: Denver, Colorado**

Joaquin has a strong passion in oral health and access to health care. He collaborated with the Center for Native Oral Health Research at Colorado School of Public Health to secure a grant for a study to determine the dental status of designated tribes in the Southwest. In the summer of 2013, Joaquin interned at the National Institute on Aging at the National Institutes of Health in Baltimore, Maryland.



**Vance Home Gun, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes**  
**Age: 20; Hometown: Arlee, Montana**

Vance, a recent high school graduate, has been working with tribal departments, local organizations, and youth groups for over six years to help preserve the Salish language. Vance teaches language classes at high schools and created an organization called Yoyoot Skkwimlmt (Strong Young People) that utilizes peer-to-peer methods to teach language and culture.



**Sarah Schilling, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians**  
**Age: 19; Hometown: Charlevoix, Michigan**

Sarah worked with her tribal council, peers, and youth programs in the community to organize and develop their tribe's first youth council in 2009. She helped create the youth council's constitution, bylaws, code of conduct, and affiliated the council with the United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY) organization.