

Community *f* By Arin Lever

A VOICE

The Power of Telling Your Own Story

Oftentimes, it is the case that stories that get told in the larger media about the native culture, don't usually come from the native culture themselves. The media swoops in, takes a few photos and writes a quick article without seeking to understand and listen to the people fully. Resulting in the culture being portrayed in a very stereotypically and surface manner. When A VOICE-Art Vision & Outreach In Community Education was incorporated by photographer David J. Spear and Jill Erickson in June of 2006 they sought to give the native population their own voice. "The idea that I can share photography with people is incredible because photography changed my life," David tells us. "Each of my students sees the world in a way that moves me, they capture moments that have a wow factor, that I would never have taken. It is truly them sharing and documenting their culture and it has nothing to do with me."

The primary goal of A VOICE-Art Vision & Outreach In Community Education is to foster excitement and confidence in youth who may not otherwise have this type of opportunity. It is their hope that the skills and self-confidence nurtured in literary

and visual arts learning will provide tools for young people to aid them in their decisions and endeavors, to guide them toward success. "You can see how proud the students are of the work that they've done," cofounder of A VOICE Jill Erickson relates. "It helps them to be creative, and helps them express themselves, opening up their eyes to other possibilities."

Katie Medicine Bull started her sophomore year at Two Eagle River School and that's when she was first introduced to the

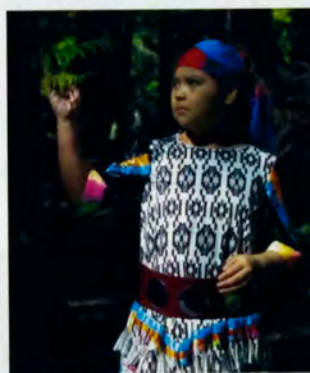


Photo by Katie Medicine Bull

photography program. "It really brought me out of my shell," she recalls. "It helped me realize what I wanted to do as a career."

Katie's goal is to spread more awareness of cultural problems through her art. She is proud that her work was featured in the Getty Museum. "I have experienced success that I could never have

fathomed, and that's all thanks to David and the team".



Photo by Frankie Barnaby

Just one of the many projects from over the years was "Water Is a Women's Issue", which was an international collaboration that premiered the work of students from the Flathead Nation at the 2019 Photoville Festival in New York City. One of a series of partnerships with the Lower Eastside Girls Club of NYC, the "Water" show featured the work of students from across the U.S. and Mexico. Four students from A VOICE who contributed to the project -- Michael Bolen, Odessa Kenmille, Brittany Morgieau, and Chandra Whiteman-LaForge -- traveled to NYC to introduce and speak about their work at the Festival's opening.

Another project, “We Dare Tell” is an intergenerational interviewing project sponsored by A VOICE and serving students at Two Eagle River School. Led by writer Jennifer Finley and photographer David J. Spear, We Dare Tell is a contemporary form of oral storytelling, reviving the Native American storytelling circle in which the storytellers share their lives, their experiences, their dreams and their hardships. We Dare Tell allows students to connect through interactive dialogue with the storyteller and interview and document their people and their origins. Native American elders share their stories with youth and, in doing so, maintain a traditional and personal tie between generations. Those who experience the stories, whether they are Native American or not, can share in that cultural bond.



Photo by Justice Antoine



Photo by John Xsus Stevens

Please come see A VOICE’s current project “RezMade” a photo exhibition that runs through early November 2024 at Bigfork’s new Imagine IF Library. The exhibit features photographs by Salish Kootenai College and Two Eagle River School photographers. Bigfork ImagineIF Library is located at 186 Bridge Street in Bigfork. Their hours are Tuesday-Friday 10 AM-6 PM and Saturday 10 AM-2 PM.

A VOICE-Art Vision & Outreach is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based on the Flathead Nation in western Montana, and they carry out projects in rural Tribal communities. Learn how to support by visiting: avoice-outreach.org or sent directly to P.O. Box 832, Pablo, MT 59855. To supply materials, volunteer, or learn more about support needs, please call 406-675-0858.