



## 2021 Outstanding Participant

*Nominated by California Indian Manpower Consortium, Inc.*

### Lester Nelson, Jr.

La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians

Mr. Lester Nelson, Jr. committed to pursuing and completing a drug and alcohol training program during a time when the majority of the country shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the closures and multiple barriers, he not only completed the training, but also decided to continue his education.

Drugs and alcohol came into Lester's life at a young age which led to him being shot twice by the time he was 16 years old. He has struggled with alcoholism and drug addiction his whole life as a lot of others on the reservations have.

Lester started his journey for Wellbriety two years ago, after he lost his two best friends - his cousin and his uncle. As he stood at their funerals and saw the despair and pain it brought to his family, he had a moment of clarity. He could see that he was only going to cause the same pain to his children and family if he kept on the same road.

During his journey to recovery, Lester did a lot of self-work and learned about intergenerational trauma and how it is passed down unknowingly through generations. He wanted to get more education so he could help other Native people overcome addiction and alcoholism, as he had done.

To further his education, Lester reached out to California Indian Manpower Consortium, Inc. (CIMC) for assistance. In collaboration with other organizations, CIMC was able to help Lester advance toward achieving his goals by paying a portion of his tuition to enroll in a drug and alcohol counseling vocational training program, providing gas money, and provision of clothing for his new job.

Lester has successfully secured employment and is currently utilizing his skills and personal experience to help others in their recovery. As an Associate CD Counselor with the Riverside-San Bernardino County Indian Health Clinic, he now works with Native people who are struggling with chemical dependency and intergenerational trauma. In a few months, Lester will be eligible to test for his Certified Alcohol Drug Counselor (CADC I). His story of how he overcame a life of despair is not only admirable but inspirational to his family and community.



*"Thank you to CIMC for all of your support. WE DID THIS!"*





## 2021 Outstanding Participant

*Nominated by Phoenix Indian Center, Inc.*

### **Stelarissa Brown** Navajo Nation

Ms. Stelarissa Brown first came to the Phoenix Indian Center, Inc. in May 2019 as a single mother with a desire to advance in the healthcare field or in administrative service for business accounting. Ms. Brown sought an opportunity that could result in a career that would ensure financial stability for her and her son.

Stelarissa's dedication to seeking out new opportunities and being resourceful when times were not good for everybody and the most challenging for many is commendable. She took in her mother to diminish any risks of contracting COVID-19 when her mother was residing on the Navajo Nation reservation at the peak of widespread infection. Stelarissa was diligent in finding a job to support not only her mother, but her 11-year-old son.

Stelarissa started with workshops in October 2019 while she continued seeking options for employment advancement and followed through with all job leads. She continued her workshop participation throughout the end of the year into the new year and attended all workshops by the end of February 2020. She also completed a Work Experience activity.

Over time, with closures across the country and mandatory stay-at-home orders due to the pandemic, Stelarissa found it difficult to search for employment. The Phoenix Indian Center, Inc. was able to assist with rent in the month of March at the height of the pandemic, including other supportive services to help with household items and food. The program even helped her with an eye exam and new pair of eyeglasses.

Stelarissa overcame many challenges, including home-schooling her son and transporting her mother to doctor's appointments, to achieve her goals. Stelarissa is now employed with Sacred Peaks Healthcare Center in the patient services department and can now provide for her family just as she hoped to at the beginning of her enrollment.

*"The most important thing I took from my participation is - change is always good, keep striving for your goals and don't give up. The workforce program made me realize I am capable of more. So now I am enrolling back into school to receive my bachelor's degree in business administration."*





## 2021 Outstanding Participant

*Nominated by Cherokee Nation*

### Summer Locust Cherokee Nation

Ms. Summer Locust has went above and beyond to overcome her hardships and poor decisions. She has proven to be focused, determined, and willing to do what it takes to succeed.

At a young age of 16, Summer started juggling school and a full time job at a nursing center where she worked as a waitress in the kitchen assisting residents with meals. About a year after starting, she attended Certified Nursing Assistant classes in the evening. By her senior year of high school, Summer was attending regular classes and working on the weekends. She began taking concurrent classes with Northeastern State University and started a part-time job in the evenings.

Although it may seem like Summer was highly motivated, once she started college all that motivation vanished. She started failing her classes and ended up dropping out. She continued working at the nursing home and obtained her Certified Medication Aide (CMA) license.

Following a relationship failure, Summer quit her job and turned to substance abuse and ended up being arrested. Following her arrest, Summer, along with her partner, began the struggle to recover from her drug use and began her motherhood journey.

Just a couple months of being clean, Summer was accepted into the Business Technology class that the Cherokee Nation offers. It helped her gain the skills needed to start a career. She was in the Business Tech class for a few months and then started a work experience activity with the 477-NHE HOPE program. The HOPE program helped Summer get back on her feet and stay there. Since then, she has been officially hired on with Cherokee Nation and has obtained stable housing for her family.

*"I have made many mistakes in my life, some of which I do not think are forgivable but the staff here at Cherokee Nation and the HOPE program have been more than welcoming with my past and I am truly grateful of the opportunity they have given me."*





## 2021 Outstanding Participant

*Nominated by Cherokee Nation*

### **Kaysie Simpson** Cherokee Nation

Ms. Kaysie Simpson has overcome losing her home, employment, and custody of her children, and having her spouse incarcerated due to self/spouse drug addiction to becoming an LPN.

In November 2015, Kaysie first visited the Cherokee Nation Career Services office in Claremore. Both she and her husband had gotten into some legal troubles which required her to complete Rogers County Drug Court; her husband was incarcerated for six months. This particular program does come with fees that have to be paid. She had also lost custody of both of her children due to the same trouble and became homeless.

Kaysie was placed on CN Tribal Training program which helped her secure a hotel to avoid having to continue to sleep in her car and provided some work experience history. After a few weeks, training opportunities were explored and in January 2016, with the assistance of the 102-477 program, Kaysie started her first vocational class which was her Certified Nursing Assistant program from Northeast Area Vo-Tech in Claremore while continuing to work with the Tribal Training Program. On some days she even had to walk to class because she couldn't afford the gas it would take to get her both to school and to work. She continued her educational healthcare journey thanks to the PL 102-477 program which included her taking all her pre-requisites for the LPN program.

2019 became a huge year for Kaysie. She completed her required drug court requirements, regained custody of her two children, and attained her LPN. Her husband also completed his requirements. He became a student in 2020 while continuing to work part-time even earning a scholarship through his employer. They also purchased their first home.

Here we are now in 2021 and Kaysie is still a LPN working for Indian Health Services in Claremore at the COVID clinic. The CN Career Services is now assisting her with continued education into the RN program as she has been accepted at three different local training sites.





## **2021 Howard Yackus Memorial Scholarship Award**

*Nominated by California Indian Manpower Consortium, Inc.*

### **Jane Roxas**

Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation

Ms. Jane Roxas has entered her first year of college this Fall at Hawaii Pacific University where she is studying biochemistry. She plans to earn a Bachelors degree and move towards a Masters degree to gain the knowledge and experience to enter the scientific community as a researcher. Her long-term goal is to become a biochemist in a lab that works towards the improvement of human health, especially for Native Americans.

As a participant of the California Indian Manpower Consortium, Inc. (CIMC) Chicago Based Operations, Jane secured employment as a youth intern at Trickster Cultural Center in Shamburg, Illinois. She has garnered a lot of experience and support from the community that the Trickster Cultural Center serves. Jane was also able to further connect and absorb more Native culture into her daily life.

As a participant in the CIMC Coders Boot Camp, Jane was able to use the information she learned as an efficient tool for work. In the beginning, coding and design was not her primary path, but she became very interested and intrigued by that line of work and hopes to use her knowledge to find opportunities that include coding within her studies of biochemistry.



*"I am grateful for the staff support and opportunities given to me through the WIOA program."*

### **About Howard Yackus**

Howard was an active supporter in the early years of the Southern California Indian Center, Inc., then known as the Orange County Indian Center (OCIC). Howard was always at fundraising events to support cultural activities like the Annual OCIC Powwow. After OCIC incorporated and captured its first Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) grant. Mr. Yackus was tasked by the OCIC Board to manage the new grant and became the director of the OCIC Manpower Development Program. Howard Yackus served his people all his adult life in both work and play. He was a role model to many and mentored numerous young Indian people and remained active all his life. Howard left us too soon and tragically. On Sunday, August 31, 1986, while attending a powwow at the Barona Indian Reservation, Howard returned home to Cerritos to golf with plans to return to the powwow that evening. That day was the day that Howard and his new family were lost to us as an Aeromexico jet crashed into his home.



## 2021 Outstanding Employer

*Nominated by California Indian Manpower Consortium, Inc.*



### **American Indian Health Service of Chicago, Inc.**

RoxAnne LaVallie-Unabia, Executive Director

Executive Director Ms. RoxAnne LaVallie-Unabia worked diligently to successfully keep the American Indian Health Service (AIHS) of Chicago, Inc. clinic open during the COVID-19 pandemic. This effort ensured that Native Americans, Seniors, and patients were tested for COVID-19 and given priority for vaccination against the virus. This act of care does not only give importance to the Native American community, but also made staff feel the importance of their role and being a part of AIHS of Chicago. Ms. LaVallie goes above and beyond to recognize staff and provides any type of support her staff may need so they can do a more efficient job for the community.

For the first time, AIHS hosted a large event for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) with 750 attendees. Employees (Native and Non-Native) worked hard to support this event. AIHS collaborates with St. Kateri Center for Senior lunches and supports the American Indian Center of Chicago on powwows and other cultural events. AIHS of Chicago employees have developed and assisted with multiple events such as; Trunk or Treat for Native children, Cancer Survivor 5K Walk/Run, among others. AIHS holds the 7 Sacred Branches Teaching for a Youth grant through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA), working with adults as well as youth.

During its activities and information events, AIHS encourages more Native Americans to utilize AIHS and learn about utilizing other organizations in our community so we can grow and help one another. AIHS refers all Native American employees to California Indian Manpower Consortium, Inc. for needed assistance.

In April 2021, AIHS received the City of Chicago Mayor's Certificate of Honor for extraordinary contributions to Chicago Native residents. AIHS was recognized for its passionate commitment to public service, to uplifting residents of Chicago's 77 neighborhoods and to bettering the lives of all who reside in the city.