



 **NATIVE NEWS ONLINE**

2023-24 **IMPACT** **REPORT**

YOUR SUPPORT. OUR STORIES. LIVES TRANSFORMED.



nativenewsonline.net



Levi Rickert

Publisher and Editor

Letter from Levi: Stories of Impact

At *Native News Online*, we are driven to provide our readers with the Native perspective on news and issues that matter most to our tribal communities. We share stories that showcase the vibrancy and diversity woven into the fabric of Native American culture in contemporary times.

The concerns across Indian Country are plentiful and need to be addressed. As a Native American publication, we dig deeper and go further than mainstream and other non-Native media sources. We know that the journey is an ongoing task, and we invite you to be a part of our collective narrative.

This report highlights our accomplishments and their impact on Indian Country during our 13th year of publishing *Native News*. As you read through this 2023 Impact Report, you will notice a few common themes, especially our commitment to continually showing up, our insistence on covering topics overlooked by other media, and our efforts to collaborate with others.

I'm proud that we were the sole news organization to show up for all 12 of the stops of the "Road to Healing" listening sessions convened by the Department of Interior to hear testimony from Indian boarding school survivors and their descendants.

I'm also proud that we are the only Native American publication with a dedicated health desk. Over the past two years, we have published more than 275 stories about the health disparities and inequities between Native Americans and other Americans.

Many of our stories have been co-published with other Native media outlets like the *Navajo-Hopi Observer* and *Lakota Times*, as well as mainstream media outlets such as *Elle*, *The Guardian*, *Yahoo News*, and *McClatchy Newspapers*. These collaborations amplify our coverage of important stories and crucial issues.

We know our work is important, and we appreciate your continued support of *Native News*.

Thayék gde nwéndëmen - We are all related.



Photo: Darren Thompson

Mission Statement

The mission of *Native News Online* is to ensure that American Indian, Alaska Native and other Indigenous people in North America are **seen, heard, understood** and **valued**. Our mission is grounded in delivering honest, timely, and relevant journalism that centers on the Native perspective. Through our work, we strive to amplify Native voices, enhance Indigenous representation in the media, and bring attention to the richness of Native history, heritage, and culture. By sharing truthful narratives and compelling stories, we hope to enlighten, uplift, and inspire Native Americans — and educate all Americans about Native people living in contemporary times.

Vision Statement

Our vision is to “change the narrative” about Indian Country by providing truthful, timely and relevant journalism about the issues that affect Indigenous people in North America. We want to build — and serve — an audience of Native and non-Native people and intend to make our news accessible and free for all.



Photo: Levi Rickert

The Road to Healing | Indian Boarding Schools Reporting

Over the past 13 years, *Native News Online* has witnessed and reported some of Indian Country's most important stories: the Standing Rock resistance, the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous people, and COVID-19's deadly sweep through tribal nations.

During that period there was another story looming in Indian Country — one that began two centuries ago and may well be the most consequential story of our lifetimes as Natives.

Beginning in 1819, Native American children were taken from their families and placed in boarding schools as part of a federal effort to assimilate them into white, Christian culture. Thousands of children died far from their homes. Many more suffered abuse at the hands of the government and church, scarring them and generations that followed.

As Native people, we knew about boarding schools. We just didn't speak about them very often — or at all.

That changed in May 2021, when news broke about a mass grave at a former boarding school where the buried remains of 215 innocent Native children were discovered. Suddenly, the world woke up to the atrocities committed against Native children in the U.S. and Canada.

Since then, we have reported more than 210 stories about Indian boarding schools. We have traveled cross country on the federal government's "Road to Healing" listening tour, where we spoke with survivors of these schools and heard their stories of abuse and trauma.

These stories are hard to hear, but we know that allowing survivors and their descendants the opportunity to share their stories is an important step toward healing — not just because they are speaking, but because they are being heard. Their stories must be heard. We'll continue to listen.

STORIES WITH IMPACT



The Rise of Indigenous Doulas | Co-publishing

Across Indian Country, there is a silent health epidemic killing Native women: pregnancy and childbirth. The United States is failing its mothers, and Black and Indigenous women are bearing the brunt of those pregnancy-related deaths.

In Washington state, where Native women are 8.5 times more likely to die around childbirth than white women, Indigenous birth keepers are drawing on traditional knowledge and culturally competent care to help Native women reclaim birthing practices, parenting practices, and community. They're also saving lives.

For this story—co-published by *Native News Online* and *ELLE Magazine* and supported with a grant from **The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting**—we profiled five Indigenous doulas and their Native clients in Seattle throughout the summer.

The problem, they said, is racism, not race. So they themselves are administering the solution.

Photos: Jessica Lázaro Moss

STORIES WITH IMPACT

Lighting Up Navajo Nation | Mutual Aid Project

Nearly 20,000 homes in the Navajo Nation have never had electricity — leaving nearly 40% of Navajo families on the 27,000-square-mile reservation without electricity and the modern necessities it brings.

With the average cost of \$40,000 to hook up a reservation home to electricity, Navajo Nation turned to a unique solution: Light Up Navajo. This mutual aid program brings volunteer utility workers nationwide to connect Navajo homes to the grid.

In June, *Native News Online* Senior Editor Elyse Wild spent a week on the Navajo Nation reporting on Light Up Navajo. She met families whose lives were changed by getting electricity — families whose children once did homework by flashlight and elders who stored fresh food and medication in camping coolers filled with store-bought ice. She also met utility workers whose experience hooking Navajo families up to electricity was so transformative that many committed to returning next year.

The lack of basic utilities such as electricity and running water in Tribal communities is rooted in broken treaty promises and antiquated laws designed to exclude Native American reservations. Addressing these issues is critical to bridging the disparities Indigenous peoples experience in health, education, and economics. Mutual aid projects such as Light Up Navajo step in where the federal government has repeatedly failed.



Photo by Melissa Parrish



STORIES WITH IMPACT

The Overdose Epidemic | Indigenous Health Solutions

Tribal Nations are on the front lines of the nation's ongoing opioid crisis and overdose epidemic. As the presence of fentanyl, a highly lethal synthetic opioid 50 times stronger than heroin, continues to rise in the nation's drug supply, Native Americans are 2.6 times more likely to die of an overdose than whites.

Our coverage of this critical issue has been focused on Indigenous health solutions and culturally centered care. We've spotlighted harm-reduction experts and addiction specialists who are Indigenizing care and helping Native communities find healing.

This epidemic isn't just about the people who are dying. It's about their families and the people they've left behind — their elders and aunts, sisters and cousins, neighbors and their friends. The overdose epidemic affects the entire Native community.

Since mid-2023, *Native News Online* has published dozens of articles and hosted two national live streams about the breadth of the overdose crisis. In our reporting, we've engaged with health care leaders, policymakers and Congressional leaders, state and federal agencies, tribal leaders and Native citizens. We have also amplified these important stories through co-publishing partnerships with *The Guardian*, *McClatchy Newspapers*, *Yahoo News*, and tribally owned media outlets.

Sun-Maid Raisin Board of Imagination | Uplifting Stories

In June 2023, Amanda Murphy emailed *Native News Online* after her seven-year-old daughter Isabelle (Cherokee) was chosen as a semi-finalist out of more than 1,000 people nationwide vying to be on Sun-Maid's Board of Imagination.

Would we, she asked, be interested in writing a story to let Indian Country know about Isabelle and her effort to win votes in this highly competitive contest?

Amanda explained winners receive a \$5,000 scholarship, a \$5,000 donation for their school, and one year's worth of snack prizes for their school. The biggest prize was winners get to work alongside Sun-Maid executives to provide input on products, learn about business, and see what happens behind the scenes.

We ran a story. A few weeks later, Amanda reached out to let us know that Isabelle had won. The article, Amanda said, helped garner votes from our readers for Isabelle.

Isabelle can be found on the Sun-Maid's website with this description: "Agent Isabelle loves science, traveling, and especially reading. Whether she's picking up a good story from the library, or writing down her own, she's a smart and sneaky addition to the team."



Isabelle Murphy won a seat on the Sun-Maid Board of Imagination. (Photo/Courtesy)

STORIES WITH IMPACT



Repatriating Our Ancestors | Accountability Journalism

Since 1990, federal law has required the repatriation of Native American human remains and cultural artifacts. Enacted by Congress, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) recognized that the human remains of Native ancestors “must at all times be treated with dignity and respect” and belong to their descendants, Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations.

Over the last year, *Native News Online* has held museums and institutions across the country accountable for following NAGPRA, which requires them to return the more than 100,000 Native American human remains they hold. From Carlisle to Harvard, we have reported stories of return under federal law, and have been recognized by tribal and NAGPRA officials as instrumental in holding institutions accountable.

Our continued reporting on the Sisseton Wahpeton tribe’s years-long effort to bring home three relatives who died at boarding school in Pennsylvania was credited by the tribe’s historian and repatriation leader as critical for putting pressure on the Army to return the boys last summer.

“I believe throughout that (*Native News Online’s* reporting) brought a response from the Army,” Tamara St. James told us after her relatives were returned in September. “It also allowed, when we sought the help of the Native American Rights Fund, they were able to find your work to draw from...the finer details of this issue. It really helped even in their decision-making about taking on their case. The media, in this instance, your work, has been such a driving force for us.”

National NAGPRA Program Manager Melanie O’Brien told *Native News* that repatriation coverage by the media “helped lighten the load” for those who work in repatriation by conveying the significance of the work. “Reporting on repatriation has helped humanize the technical and bureaucratic process of repatriation by reminding readers that these stories are about people,” O’Brien said.

Photo: Jenna Kunze



STORIES WITH IMPACT



Replenishing What Has Been Stolen | Native Climate Solutions

Senior Reporter Jenna Kunze (pictured in hat) dove into this solutions story that explores one tribe's effort to reclaim their ancestral practice of kelp farming while also restoring a balance to their polluted environment.

Before the waters surrounding southeastern Long Island were the backyards of the ultra-rich, they had been home to the Shinnecock people and other tribal nations for 10,000 years. Now, women from the **Shinnecock Nation**—the closest federally recognized tribe to New York City—are returning to their traditional kelp farming practice of kelp farming. It is both an exercise of tribal sovereignty and a means of cleaning their polluted waterways.

In 2023 alone, the women harvested 2,000 pounds of kelp, sequestering 56 lbs of carbon and 4 lbs of nitrogen from Shinnecock Bay and Moriches Bay.

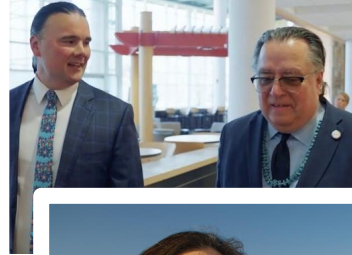
Photo: Jenna Kunze

Hope + Healing Podcast | Health Equity News Collaboration

Native News Online and the **National Indian Health Board (NIHB)**, a national nonprofit organization serving tribes and their citizens, launched a bi-weekly podcast on health equity issues in Indian Country in late 2023. The Hope+Healing Podcast builds on a six-episode pilot season the partners produced in 2022-23 focused on a single topic, Medicare/Medicaid in Indian Country.

Season two of the podcast promises to cover a spectrum of topics, from Native American health news and historical context to storytelling, policy and advocacy, pockets of progress, community voices, challenges, and health equity solutions. It serves as a platform for change, leveraging the expertise and networks of Native News and NIHB to bring vital conversations to a national audience. The initiative reflects a shared commitment to addressing healthcare challenges faced by Native American communities, offering an enlightening journey towards hope and healing for a healthier future in Indian Country.





Native Bidaské

“Shining light on those making news and leading change in Indian Country”

Native Bidaské (Spotlight) is a popular weekly live stream interview show that features Indigenous people making news and leading change in Indian Country. Produced and distributed by *Native News Online*, the show is broadcast across multiple social media platforms – including Facebook, YouTube and X (formerly known as Twitter) – and our own web and e-newsletter platforms.

The term “Bidaské,” derived from the Potawatomi language, translates to “shining light on to” or “spotlight,” which captures the essence of the series.

Pictured (from left): Olympian Billy Mills, marathoner Hosava Kretzmann, model/activist Ashley Callingbull, Assistant Secretary Indian Affairs Bryan Newland, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, *Reservation Dogs* creator Sterlin Harjo, MSNBC’s Alyssa London.

Launched in 2022, the show has featured a distinguished array of Indigenous people, including state and federal officials, actors and authors, educators and environmentalists, models and activists, filmmakers and media personalities, and others. A few are highlighted above on this page.

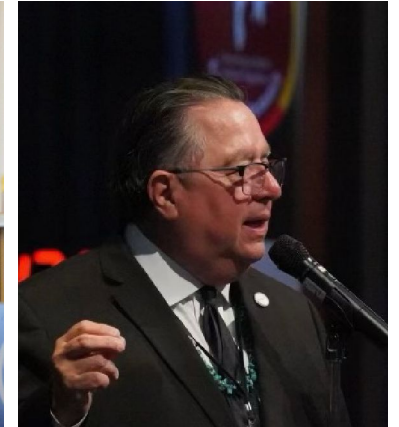
Hosted by Editor and Publisher Levi Rickert, Native Bidaské features compelling and timely conversations that are tapped into the news of the week in Indian Country.

Great Lakes Tribal Economic Summit

The Great Lakes Tribal Economic Summit has quickly become an annual gathering, providing a crucial platform for tribal leaders and Native executives from tribes in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota to discuss and showcase their economic progress.

The summit, organized by our **Tribal Business News** affiliate, focuses on the evolving landscape of economic development in Indian Country, emphasizing diversification beyond traditional casino enterprises. The event addresses emerging opportunities in federal contracting, real estate development, and growing sectors like clean energy and Native tourism.

The summit fosters collaboration, information exchange, and inspiration among Native professionals, attracting attendees from across the Great Lakes region and the entire country. As tribes actively navigate challenges such as construction industry dynamics, talent sourcing, and material lead times, the summit also serves as a nexus for state and federal agencies to discuss investments in tribal communities. The summit's success during its first two years is evidenced by growing attendance and a positive impact on tribal economic development, encouraging diversification, and long-term strategic thinking.





Pictured (from left): Senior Reporter Jenna Kunze teaches elementary school children about journalism; Kunze aims and shoots; Associate Editor Brian Edwards interviews U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids; Publisher Levi Rickert speaks with Deb Parker of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition; Senior Editor Elyse Wild lighting up Navajo Nation

Native News in the Community

The *Native News Online* team actively engages with and contributes to the community it covers, Indian Country, surpassing traditional journalism norms. Instead of merely observing, the team immerses itself in the community, convening tribal leaders to discuss critical issues such as Native mental health, economic sovereignty, and the impact of Indian boarding schools. Embracing education, the team volunteers to teach journalism to students of all ages, emphasizing the role of journalism in Indian Country.

Through volunteering, participation in panel discussions, and interviews with national and regional media, the team shares the Native perspective on crucial matters, including tribal economic sovereignty and repatriation of Native ancestors. Levi Rickert's trusted relationships with tribal leaders underscore the team's dedication to fostering open dialogue and addressing community concerns. This comprehensive engagement underscores a sincere commitment to understanding and amplifying the voices of Indian Country.

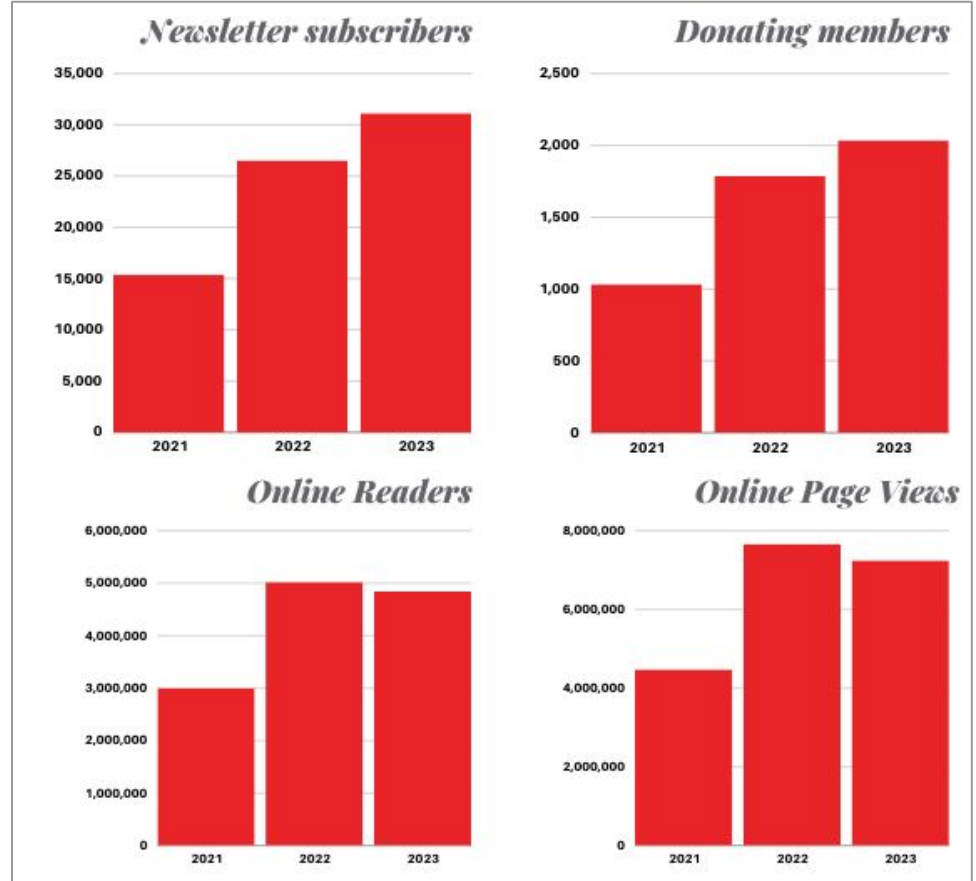
Reader & Donor Metrics | 2023

31,149 newsletter subscribers

2,036 readers made donations

4.9 million online readers

7.3 million pageviews

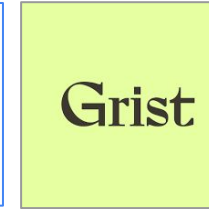
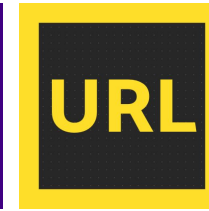


Amplifying Native Stories

Native News Online isn't just for Native Americans. While we report stories every day for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, our commitment to reporting extends far beyond the boundaries of Indian Country.

Our reporting plays an important role in educating non-Natives — policymakers, funders, allies, advocates, and mainstream media, in particular — about the issues that matter most to Native people living in contemporary times.

That's why we value partnerships and collaborations with other Native and mainstream media organizations such as these shown here. By disseminating our stories widely, we contribute to a more accurate and nuanced understanding of Native experiences. We amplify Native voices. We help dismantle stereotypes and dispel misconceptions with a vision of fostering a deep appreciation for the unique contributions and perspectives of Native people.



Make An Impact. Join the Founder's Circle.

We formed the Founder's Circle in 2023 for readers who want to support our journalism and work more closely with us in pursuit of our mission to ensure that Native Americans are heard, seen, understood and valued. Readers who join the Founder's Circle in 2024 will receive:

- Exclusive quarterly briefing from Publisher Levi Rickert
- Exclusive invitation to quarterly Zoom call with Levi and our team
- Amplification opportunities to get the word out on important issues
- Exclusive "first look" at special editorial reports by our team
- Exclusive behind-the-scenes discussions with our journalists
- A copy of our 2024 book, which will be published in October

To join, we ask that you make a recurring monthly contribution of \$13 or more, or a one-time donation of \$150 this year. It's our 13th year of publishing *Native News Online*, and we hope you'll join us.

To join, visit nativenewsonline.net/donate or mail a check to: Indian Country Media, LLC, P.O. Box 1629, Grand Rapids, MI 49501-1629



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