

# CPHE Newsletter November, 2022

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

## CPHE National Network Meeting Navajo Nation, 9/22-24, 2022

**Who Knew?** Who knew in 2006, when MEDICC's CPHE program began, that it would evolve over the next 17 years into the family of solidarity and support that it is today. The initial magnet and unifying force for CPHE was traveling to Cuba. What has evolved is a collaboration of dynamic and diverse communities, united in their work for environmental justice and health equity. In September, members from all over the U.S. had the privilege of visiting



the CPHE team in Navajo Nation, for the 6<sup>th</sup> CPHE National Network meeting, with the theme of *Community Leadership in Environmental Justice*. The power of seeing each other after so long was palpable. Building a national base of community leadership across cultures, ages, ethnicities and distances, is what CPHE is about. Who could have predicted in 2006 the staying power of this magic? But there's no stopping it now.



At the 6<sup>th</sup> CPHE Network meeting in Farmington, New Mexico, attendees from South Bronx NY, Milwaukee WI, Albuquerque NM, New Orleans LA, Navajo Nation, Akron OH, Atlanta GA, San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles and Del Norte, CA were honored by the presence of Mr. Jonathan Nez (center), President of the Navajo Nation.

Friday  
September 23  
Site Visits

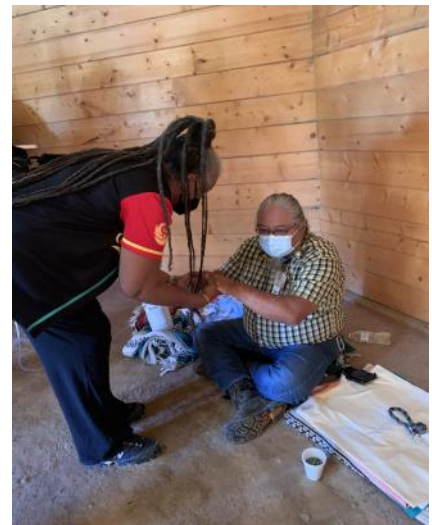


### Shiprock, New Mexico, A Navajo Hogan

John Hosteen, Navajo CPHE, provided history and context as CPHE members toured parts of Navajo Nation. Our first stop was a visit to a Hogan, where we met with Mr. Harry Clark, a humble, pensive man with a wonderful sense of humor. He told us that “spiritual healer” was too lofty a term, and described himself as a “traditional practitioner.” The Hogan is part of the Shiprock Indian Health Service clinic, where patients can receive approaches to healing in tune with Navajo culture. Mr. Clark gave an overview of what the Hogan is for the Navajo (Diné) people: a traditional ceremonial structure that is built in a very specific way and purpose, with the door facing East, and no windows.

*I will never forget the Navajo Nation visits.*

*One thing I will be taking with me is the love we should show our land, our resources and our neighbors.*



### Teec Nos Pos, AZ Trading Post

This longstanding trading post, established in 1905, serves as an “everything store” for locals: groceries, including fresh fruits and vegetables, needed supplies, medicinal herbs and teas. The only store for miles, the Teec trading post also supplies wool yarn and natural dyes for Navajo weavers, who are known for their intricate rugs. Teec Nos Pos is an English variation of T’iis nazbas, which in Navajo means “circle of cottonwood trees”.



## Four Corners Navajo Monument National Tribal Park

**Four Corners Monument** is the only place where four states meet: New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah. Most of the Navajo Nation CPHE team live and work near Red Mesa and Teec Nos Pos which are part of the Four Corners region.

South Bronx CPHE group standing in 3 of the 4 States. From left to right: Diane Jones, Linda Kemp, Abraham Jones, Denise Jones, Warrick Harmon, Bernard Smith and John Morales.



## Friday, September 23 Presentations, Teec Nos Pos, Arizona

**Trash Into Art** Our Navajo Nation CPHE meeting consultant, **Kerlissa Bitah**, organized a half-day of presentations by Navajo CPHE members at the K-8 school where she works. Kerlissa's presentation, *Trash Into Art*, was inspired by a community project in Cuba which the Navajo Nation had visited, that had converted an abandoned water tank into a community center and had a youth project, literally turning trash (aluminum cans, found objects) into art. Kerlissa's similar project with Navajo youth was partially funded by MEDICC.



*I learned a lot about the challenges and hopes of the indigenous people being impacted by unbelievable environmental degradation.*



*Friday CPHE presentations (continued)*

**Darlene Begay, John Hosteen, and JoAnn Lameman** presented their work with the **Red Mesa Regional Health Center**, a federally funded outpatient clinic which covers four communities: Tiis Nazbas, Red Mesa, Sweetwater and Mexican Water, with a user population of approximately 14,500. The group addressed chronic challenges, showing a map, illustrating the large distances between markets or trading posts. They developed school gardens to teach kids to grow and harvest crops, and spoke of their intensive outreach work during the pandemic, which helped to greatly reduce mortality and morbidity of COVID.

**Kyle Jim's** presentation, *Chaos in the Glittering World*, provided some background on the Four Corners Power Plant which disrupts food and water sources, health, economy, the environment, and the spirit of the Navajo people in the area. Toxic pollutants from the power plant have contributed to chronic respiratory disease, birth defects, cancer and early mortality.

**Malysa Egge, Caitlyn Dee, Kingston Dee, Kerlissa Bitah, Carmen George, Brianna Deschene, John Hosteen and Sonya Shin** presented on the *Navajo Citizen Scientist Project Overview: DigDeep/Thriving EARTH*. Many Navajo do not trust drinking the local water due to all the uranium mining and other activities which have caused contaminants to

go into the water. Early in this project, Navajo CPHE members took an idea from Cuba to make posters of local heroes' drinking water and promoting water. Together with Navajo youth, they learned how to test water to see if it was safe to drink. The students chose what sources to sample: rivers, wind mills, wells, drinking fountains, home faucets, etc. Arsenic, lead, petroleum, uranium and other toxins were included in their testing. They are now organizing and preparing to disseminate their results to the community. They will be also be presenting this project in the next CPHE Zoom. **SAVE THE DATE:**

**Saturday, December 3, 2022**

**9am Pacific**

**10am Mountain**

**11am Central**

**12 noon Eastern**

*Without CPHE, I would never have had the opportunity to travel to Navajo Nation to see their fight for environmental justice.*



**Shiprock, Navajo Sacred Peak** was the last stop of the day—a chance to hear legends behind the amazing formation, take pictures, and appreciate our amazing day together in Navajo Nation.



## Saturday, September 24 Presentations, Farmington, NM

Saturday's meeting was moderated by CPHE community leaders Carmen George, Navajo Nation, and Marsha Broussard, New Orleans. The meeting was ignited virtually by video clips of two nationally known leaders of environmental justice. Their wise words set the tone for the day.

***"Environmental justice is having access to decisions that are being made."***



Dr. Robert Bullard  
Director, Bullard Center for Environmental /Climate Justice

***"We cannot rely on those who created the problems to fix it."***



Osawa Bineshi Albert  
Co-Director of the Climate Justice Alliance



**Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez** had traveled to Cuba with CPHE in 2016, and provided a warm welcome to CPHE attendees. He spoke of the environmental threats to Navajo Nation, and was encouraged that he had been able to meet with White House officials several times in the past few years about long-standing disparities in Navajo Nation, including clean water access. He was encouraged that a Navajo woman, Wahleah Johns, has been named to head the US Department of Indian Energy. He also praised the collaborative efforts of the Navajo health system and community leaders in their outreach to the population, efficiently reducing the COVID statistics in Navajo Nation.

**A Navajo cultural presentation** during the meeting provided beauty and inspiration.

**Asia Yazzie (Lady Yazzie)**, a talented Navajo dancer, mesmerized CPHE attendees, first with the Navajo

traditional basket dance, followed by several of her own interpretive dances, set to contemporary music she chose herself. She then gave an explanation of the personal symbolism in her work.



## Understanding Grant Funding

**Patrice Davis**, Founder and CEO of GrantsWorks Consulting and GrantsWorks Academy in Atlanta, provided an hour-long workshop on fundraising, with an emphasis on opportunities for small, non-profit organizations. Patrice holds an MS in Environmental Policy and Management and shared her knowledge of specific funding opportunities in that area of focus. Her presentation offered information on how to approach Federal, State and local government grants as well as private foundations. She advocated doing research in order to become *grant ready*. "Focus on the step in front of you. Not the whole staircase," was a bit of wisdom she imparted, as grant seeking can be overwhelming. Patrice's power point, with a list of resources, was shared with all CPHE members.



## Transforming Narrative

**Sheri Johnson**, CPHE Milwaukee, presented a national project that addressed narrative as power. *Invisible power* is inherent in the dominant narrative, what we hear daily and take for granted. It's the power to control, shape and influence world views, beliefs and values that then trickle up to the more *visible* forms of power which are policies and resource application. Sheri described the project she spearheaded in which partners from other organizations, including CPHE and Healthy Places by Design, were trained as facilitators to uncover dominant narratives that privilege some while dis-empowering others. Sheri distributed inspiring images of more equitable, positive and transformative messages to replace some of the more toxic dominant narratives.

We value diversity and inclusion



We can all have what we need



We have the power to build a transformative future!

*The name of the game is to pit Africans and Latinos, Asians, Native Americans against each other. That's the game to gain control. But we have the power to flip the script. So what happens if we make a commitment here to flip the script and to be more in contact with each other and work together to tip the scale in a different direction? If we don't, we will not thrive as people of color, because this nation is not designed for us to thrive; it's designed for us to pit one against another. So ...*

**WE HAVE THE POWER TO BUILD A TRANSFORMATIVE FUTURE!**

*-Arnold Perkins, CPHE Oakland*



## Education for Racial and Environmental Justice

**Tony Watkins**, CPHE Albuquerque, shared his own journey as a white man confronting racism early on when his father worked in Shiprock, New Mexico, where Tony witnessed unfair treatment of Navajo high school students. He currently works for Families United for Education (FUE), an organization that responds to community priorities about education. Community members called for anti-racist training, which FUE initiated into school board forums. They also developed a family engagement policy, which was adopted by the Albuquerque Public Schools district. Tony invited meeting attendees to share their own stories, illustrating one of his key values: *you have to know people in order to care about them*.

### Small Group Discussions



The heart of CPHE Network meetings is always the rich discussions that attendees are able to have, in a safe environment. For the Saturday meeting, the 45 CPHE attendees were divided into 7 small groups with CPHE members from each site represented at each color coded table: CPHE leaders who served as facilitators for the tables were Marsha McMurray-Avila, Arnold Perkins, Sonya Shin, Bregetta Wilson, Jamilah Peters-Muhammad, Francisco Ronquillo, and Abraham Jones.

**QUESTION #1: What are the major issues in your communities around environmental justice?**

It was apparent that the diverse CPHE attendees shared many identical problems, only in different settings: **Natural Resource Contamination** and pol-



lution, such as the Peabody Western Coal Company in Navajo Nation causing black lung. Or oil in the soil of some Los Angeles neighborhoods. Or a contaminated river in Akron, Ohio; **Transportation Pol-**



**icies**, such as the newly designed bus and bike lanes in South Bronx, threatening neighborhood safety and health; long standing **Housing Policies and Redlining**, as in Milwaukee, leading to homelessness and gentrification; **Lack of Green "safe" Spaces** for healthy recreation in most communities where people of color reside. Other recurring themes during the discussions were **not having a seat at the table** when decisions are made that affect communities and the **urgent need to involve young people** in the community to change the narrative, change the power.



## QUESTION #2: What community strategies are needed to work towards environmental justice?

- ◆ Take a pledge to first be true to yourself.
  - ◆ Educate yourself and teach others about the pervasiveness of environmental injustice.
  - ◆ Engage young people—beginning with elementary school. Teach them how to be healthy, take them outside; teach the power of the vote; how to manage money coming into the community. What we do today is for 7 generations to come.
  - ◆ Engage in community initiatives that support regenerative energy: food production, solar power; windmills as a source of energy.
  - ◆ Find ways to reach decision-makers. Bring in legislators, directors, academics into a space to have challenging conversations around issues in the community ( housing, toxic waste, highway construction, etc).
  - ◆ Help secure people of color in positions of power. Make sure they're accountable.
  - ◆ Get a seat at the table. Educate and create alliances with like-minded policy makers. Run for office, school boards, city council.
- ◆ Integrate the wisdom of the elders and the youthfulness of youth.
  - ◆ Meet people where they are. Block parties, sports events, food and music. Invite police and politicians.
  - ◆ Look out for each other. We took lessons from Cuba.

*You are my other me. We need to overcome the structural racism that came with colonization and recognize we have ancestral knowledge that is deep, and we are connected. Together we can.*

*-Leticia Marquez-Magana, Oakland CPHE*

### ***Our Story: The Indigenous-led fight to protect Greater Chaco***

At the end of Saturday's meeting, attendees were treated to a visually stunning film, made by Navajo and Pueblo people, including CPHE member, John Hosteen. More than 91% of the

lands in the Greater Chaco have already been leased for industrialized fracking. They are fighting for the last 9%. The film can be rented for community screenings by contacting: <https://www.wearegreaterchaco.com/>



## The Farewell Fiesta



Kerlissa Bitah (standing), with CPHE members from Navajo Nation, Del Norte, CA and Albuquerque, New Mexico

### A message from Diane Appelbaum

THANKYOU Kerlissa Bitah and family for hosting Saturday evening's dinner party at your beautiful home. And yes, I am truly retiring at the end of this year, and I was humbled by everyone's kind words wishing me well. I have learned so much from all of you, and treasure my time with MEDICC/CPHE more than I can express. A huge thank you to our funders, **The Christopher Reynolds Foundation and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**. They made this meeting possible and their support over the years has been invaluable. I am leaving CPHE in such good hands with Francisco. Peace.

### A Message from Francisco Ronquillo

It is a true pleasure for me to be the interim Program Director for CPHE. This unique opportunity came to me and I pleasantly welcomed it. CPHE began in 2005, and Diane has nurtured the program for all these years. I joined in 2010 and have been an active member since then. I sincerely appreciate how CPHE has developed into a group of super wise, community representatives, leaders, scholars, and experts. In addition to the group's intellectual abilities, the trait that I appreciate the most is the humanistic approach and love that our members have for their respective communities and the CPHE network. I humbly and gratefully take on this role with an open heart and mind. During these months I am orienting with Diane—learning to manage the different opportunities CPHE offers, and reflecting and reminiscing on this cool CPHE Network. Let's keep the connectedness and consciousness that our Navajo Nation brothers and sisters reinvigorated us with to keep moving forward with our CPHE Network of caring hearts!



Francisco Ronquillo, Diane Appelbaum and Bill Keck, MEDICC Executive Director