

Navajo social workers change lives

Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 13 July 2018 14:06



ALBUQUERQUE—President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez opened the annual Navajo Nation Division of Social Services conference July 10, with back-to-back keynote speeches that highlighted recent successes and encouraged division employees to magnify Diné cultural teachings.

About one-third of the more than 500 employees in the division's eight programs attended the 2018 conference, which runs through Thursday at Sandia Resort and Casino. The conference includes workshops addressing some of the most critical issues facing the Navajo Nation: alcohol and drug abuse, sexual assault, human trafficking, suicide, domestic violence and cyberbullying.

Guest speakers and presenters also conducted workshops on cultural teachings, overcoming historical trauma and the power of words. In his address, President Begaye spoke of receiving phone calls, emails and text messages from people experiencing their darkest moments.

“As president, I get a lot of these messages from our Diné people, especially from the youth,” he said. “I get text messages from young people telling me their friends or classmates have taken their own lives, or from people experiencing abuse, alcoholism or domestic violence.”

President Begaye said he responds to such messages with words of hope and encouragement. He reminds them to hold on to the teachings of their parents or grandparents.

“This is what social services is about,” President Begaye said. “It’s about restoring hope and bringing families back together. That’s what you do when you work in social services. You’re out there helping people become whole again.”

Navajo social workers change lives

Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 13 July 2018 14:06

Vice President Nez also spoke about promoting the Diné way of life. The theme of the conference is “empower and strengthen each other to reach new horizons,” and empowerment comes from embracing cultural identity, he said.

“What you’re doing out there with your clients is magnifying culture,” Vice President Nez said. “A lot of people out there are going through tough times, facing alcoholism, drug abuse and depression, but a lot of the answers to our problems are right there within our teachings. You are using those teachings in your work.”

Vice President Nez encouraged social workers to teach by example and to model resilience and self-reliance. He also urged them to take care of themselves.

“You may wonder if you’re making a difference,” he said. “I can tell you, as a leader of the Navajo Nation, that you are changing lives. One life saved or one family reunited is well worth the effort.”

Now is the time to change the trajectory of the Navajo narrative, Vice President Nez said. Now is the opportune time to work together and make a difference.

“This is a tilting point in Navajo Nation history,” he said. “Hope is what people are lacking, but hope is what people are wanting. If we come together as one, working in unity, just imagine how much better off our young children will be.”

Staff Reports