

## Na’Nizhoozhi Center, Inc. shows its spiritual side

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent  
Wednesday, 21 November 2018 13:36

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### Open-house attendees tour renovated facility, hear from guest speakers

Na’Nizhoozhi Center, Inc., a substance-abuse treatment and detox facility located at 2201 Boyd Ave. in Gallup, held an open house of its newly renovated facility Nov. 16.

Updates to the facility, which provides both short- and long-term inpatient treatment, include 60 new beds in the residential areas, a renovated kitchen and dining areas, an intake center and the facility’s spiritual areas.

According to former McKinley County Commission Chairman David Dallago, NCI takes in roughly 26,000 patients a year.

NCI Clinical Director Kevin Foley said the facility renovations began after NCI received a Preventing Alcohol Related Deaths grant from Indian Health Services for \$1.5 million on Oct. 1, 2017.

The open-house event began with a speech by Mayor Jackie McKinney, who praised the efforts

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of NCI in reducing public intoxication and providing humane care to the publicly intoxicated.

“The support shown here is above and beyond,” McKinney said during the event. “It shows the compassion in your hearts, and that you are tried and true to provide [detox] services.”

McKinney discussed the project’s funding and praised the efforts of McKinley County, City Manager Maryann Ustick and Behavioral Health Investment Zone Project Director Debra Martinez in supporting the efforts of NCI.

“This [facility] shows we’re capable of running programs to prevent alcohol-related deaths,” McKinney said.

He discussed NCI’s efforts to protect troubled individuals from themselves, citing his own experience working with the facility toward sobriety some time back.

McKinney said NCI does not provide handouts, but rather a hand-up to help people change their lives.

“If we can save one life, we’ve done a good job,” he said.

NCI gives people a chance to learn they can change, McKinney added.

And thanks to the funding in place, which includes an annual \$500,000 BHIZ grant from the state, the design of a new IHS facility could be completed by 2020, he said, with another four years to finish construction on the new building.

“We need to continue to save lives,” McKinney said. “The final decision [to quit] is [the patient’s], but we plant the seed.”

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Foley told the crowd about the annual pow-wow held at Miyamura High School on New Year’s Eve, which he said is attended by thousands of people. It’s one of the NCI events aimed at reducing public intoxication during the New Year.

Guest speaker and 2018 NCI Pow-Wow Princess Mary Beyal said the work she’s done with NCI is close to her heart. She said she’s enjoyed meeting people through NCI’s efforts.

“NCI opened my eyes and gave me perspective,” Beyal said.

Sasha James, an intake clerk for NCI’s First Step program, also spoke at the event. She said the goal of First Step is to give the people enrolled in the program more manageable goals to achieve sobriety.

First Step takes place in four phases, she said. During the first phase, the patient addresses their reasons for seeking sobriety.

During the second phase, they work with an NCI counselor to formulate a plan to get and stay sober, followed by the third phase, when the person enacts their program plan.

The final phase entails reintegration, when the person in recovery is given the means and assistance to return to society as a functioning, sober individual.

The program lasts 90 days and uses a combination of Western and traditional healing to help individuals on their path to sobriety.

Peter Begay of BHIZ said NCI admits around 1,000 patients a month, and the people in the First Step program pick the 200 most promising patients to work with in an intensive way.

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Begay mentioned a particular patient brought in for recovery. He said the patient’s primary objective was, “I want to live.”

Begay said caring for such people is what they do.

After listening to the speakers, open-house attendees toured NCI’s new and updated facilities.

Near the basketball court in the center of the NCI grounds, attendees visited a small kiva with a fireplace and space for talks with a medicine man. Folks warmed themselves inside the kiva on the cold November day.

The spiritual area is north of NCI’s main facility, and comprises a hogan, tipi and sweat lodges used by patients.

Inside the tipi, open-house guests received a cedar blessing as they stood in a circle around the fire at the center.

Fred Jim, an NCI counselor, told guests the cultural ways of healing help put patients’ minds at ease.

“These are healing grounds, sacred grounds,” he said. “It shows compassion for them.”

NCI Counselor Leroy Nelson discussed the significance of the stars and how they guide people from birth. He told the crowd everything is a star and everyone is connected.

“Find a place to set your mind, define yourself,” Nelson said. “There is a better life for you in this

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place.”

Alfred Gibson, a traditional counselor who has worked with NCI for 21 years, said the first step for many patients is to find their spirituality. He said fire is the light of life within everyone.

“It helps people to understand who they are, and who they come from,” Gibson said.

Foley told the crowd each log used to build the hogan has a purpose. The hogan, he said, is used to teach patients to be responsible through lessons on gardening, relationships, prayer and forgiveness. The walls of the hogan hold pictures for traditional teaching.

The sweat lodges on the grounds are small areas where patients can purify their bodies, sweating out the alcohol and toxins. Foley said the lodges help patients to rebuild spiritually.

Frank Gonzales, one of the guests at the open house, took a moment to tell the *Sun* how he felt about what he saw on the tour.

“Since they first built it, there have been improvements [to the place],” he said.

***For more information on NCI, call (505) 863-3869.***

By Cody Begaye  
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