

## YOUTH, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

# Ford Family Foundation Rural Youth Development Grant

**Partners** Ford Family Foundation (funder), Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Citizens for Safe Schools

**Project lead** Lena Fox



Youth development programs provide out-of-school-time activities that extend beyond academics to encompass a whole-child perspective. But programs in rural areas often lack access to high quality professional development opportunities for staff members—especially ones tailored to the specific needs of individual programs and communities.

Through a grant from the Ford Family Foundation, Education Northwest gathered information from 53 rural youth development programs throughout Oregon to design trainings that would meet their needs. Through this process, we also helped programs build relationships with each other in different regions of the state, giving them a foundation for continued learning and mutual support.

Ford Family Foundation funding also supported tailored training sessions at selected youth development programs, including the two presented here: **Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation** (CTUIR) in northeast Oregon and **Citizens for Safe Schools** (CFSS) in southwest Oregon.

---

## Rural challenges, regional solutions

At CTUIR's Youth Center, the Tribes serve youth holistically while including families and the entire community. For the Tribes, the initial challenge was how to incorporate best practices for youth development programs in a culturally responsive way.

CFSS, as one of only two youth mentoring organizations in the entire city of Klamath Falls, wanted to adapt traditional one-on-one mentoring practices to group settings so they could meet the large demand.

---

## Enhancing youth voice and reframing conflict

CTUIR's Youth Center is located next to the Tribes' long house. In the Tribes' programs, young people from the community engage in activities such as fishing, arts and crafts, making traditional medicines like elderberry syrup, and playing games. Education Northwest youth development staff member Lena Fox helped the Tribes present these existing activities in a new way, incorporating more youth voice and choice. Youth collectively decided which activities to pursue on a given day—leveraging autonomy to enhance engagement. This aligned the program with measures such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment while retaining the traditional activities that are meaningful to the community.

In Klamath Falls, Lena observed CFSS activities such as a safe circle for LGBTQ youth. Young people also learned strategies for reframing conflict resolution. The program encouraged the same approaches to resolving conflict for youth, families, and program staff members, helping to reinforce the practices for all.

---

## Nimble implementation and mutual support

CTUIR created a youth choice board to help young people decide what activities they wanted to do each day. Program leaders initially had some concerns about whether the community would be open to changing what had been successful before. But the board contained the same favorite activities the program had offered to the community in the past. The main difference was that rather than being told by an adult which activity they would be able to do on a given day, the youth could decide together.

At CFSS, Lena was pleasantly surprised when she returned for a second day of training and saw that the conflict resolution protocol they had discussed on the first day was already posted around the building. This spoke to a great desire to implement quality programming and the nimbleness that is possible when all the decision makers are in the room—as is often the case in a rural setting.

Moving forward, the Ford Family Foundation support will help strengthen regional communities so they not only have Education Northwest as a resource, but also each other. Programs in the same region often share challenges, and regional trainings will offer more opportunities to connect and learn.