



QUILTING IN SOLIDARITY

OCTOBER 14, 2022



(left to right) Naomi Adams (SNA staff), Diana Doyle, Rainn Gorecki, Darcy Ornelaz, Zoe Ornelaz, Jessica Ornelaz (SNA staff). Photo credit: Sierra Native Alliance

The Sierra Native Alliance Youth Group Quilts a Work of Art for MMIWG

By Jeanne Ferris

For the last 15 years, the Sierra Native Alliance (SNA) has served the surrounding tribal communities in Auburn as a non-profit outpatient agency offering mental health wellness support and youth leadership through traditional cultural advocacy, Native connections, and education projects.

The SNA Youth Group from ages 13 to 18 meets weekly after school to participate in traditional Native cultural and artistic projects facilitated at SNA.

Although most US population is unaware that a high percentage of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) are never reported or investigated, the SNA Youth Group is keenly aware and has chosen to quilt a memorial to honor those women still missing.

Homicide or missing loved ones is not a light subject; so whenever this loss touches a family, it ripples through the community like a boulder dropped into a small pond of water.

All feel the weight of grief.

The US Department of Interior, Indian Affairs website confirms that the US Department of Justice's missing person database has only reported 116 cases.

This data is an inaccurate count when the National Information Crime Center, a federal agency, has documented **more than 5,000** cases of missing Native American and Alaska Native women this year.

The murder of Hanna Harris on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation and other abductions and killings of Native women across the United States has propelled the MMIWG movement organically like the wind scatters seeds and pollen across our planet.

Actions for justice in Indian Country have spread to Indigenous communities in other parts of the world suffering from the same unresolved losses.

Red Dress Day was inspired by Métis artist Jaime Black's REDress Project installation, in which she hung empty red dresses for each woman or girl violently taken. As a result, red dresses have also come to symbolize the MMIWG crisis.

Some Native American tribes believe red is the only color spirits can see. So by wearing red, Native people hope to call back the missing souls of their loved ones to help with closure and laying those missing to rest.

In addition to the color red, the powerful image of a red handprint has become the MMIWG symbol representing the thousands of women now silenced.

In 2021, President Biden issued a proclamation formalizing May 5 as a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Awareness Day.

This year, SNA Youth Group coordinator Jessica Ornelaz facilitated the idea of a quilt as a memorial with an SNA colleague.

“After the initial concept and design, it took about a month and a half to create,” Ms. Ornelaz said. “We used cotton, leather, beads, jingle bells, and abalone shells. Then, each youth chose a dress to represent a different tribe.”

After a formal civic unveiling and a Native ceremony of prayers with a traditional Native grief counselor, the MMIW quilt now hangs inside the Auburn Historical Courthouse Museum.

“It would be great if the quilt eventually travels countywide for public viewing,” Ms. Ornelaz said. “We’re excited that our annual Auburn Big Time Pow Wow will bring attention to it.”

The highly anticipated 15th Annual Auburn Big Time Pow Wow will be held this year at the Grounds, 700 Event Center Drive, Roseville, CA 95678, on October 15, 2022, between 10 am and 9:00 pm.

AGENDA

- 10 am Tribal Welcome, California Native Dancing
- 11 am Gourd Dance
- Noon- Grand Entry, Color Guard
- Tiny Tots Special
- Youth Contest
- 5 pm Dinner Break: Hawaiian Dancers, Halau Ka Waikaha Malie
- 6 pm Grand Entry
- Color Guard
- Adult Contest
- Color Guard Flag and Retreat
- 9 pm
- Contest Winner Announcement

For more information about the SNA youth programs, please call (530) 888-8767.

Or email: Mateo Ortega at mateom@sierranativealliance.org



MMIW quilt (Photo credit: Sierra Native Alliance)