

Serving the Young People of Our Community

This spring we celebrated the Tenth Anniversary of Arts-Kids and Arts-Teens on the Ute Reservation in Whiterocks. We've become an important part of the community, as evidenced by the Tribal Council's support for our efforts. We serve as a primary prevention program, working with young people ages 5 to 17 to build the healthy living skills they desperately need. We see their growth season by season and are committed to serving them and their families.

Each day begins after school with kids eating snacks and playing outside on the big lawn and playground. In the Talking Circles we introduce ourselves and set our intentions ("be open and present," "stay in control," "try something new," "have fun"). A visiting artist, usually from the Ute community, offers an open-ended creative project using media ranging from paints to beads to drumming to yoga. The teens meet separately for deeper conversations and more challenging projects.

At the heart of these activities is our team of Facilitators, local women and men who create an intergenerational community for the young people. From checking in with each other to joining in the projects to sitting down together for a hot meal, we create a family feeling.

Conversations at the art and dinner tables range from friendly joking to serious sharing as we help the participants discover and express their unique qualities.

The steady growth of these programs (about 20% a year) speaks to the atmosphere of acceptance and trust that's been created and the value of these gatherings. Thanks to the generous funding we receive from Newfield Oil Company and other smaller gifts, we've been able to train new leaders to serve the growing numbers of young people. People say that Whiterocks is a more peaceful community than it was ten years ago, and we like to think that Arts-Kids and Arts-Teens have something to do with that.

Michael Carney
St. Elizabeth's, Whiterocks