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CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE OF PREVENTION AND AWARENESS



Left to right: Vice President Jonathan Nez, Pinon High School student Tylee Tom, Pinon High School Principal Lori Chee and President Russell Begaye came together to present a message of hope when the *Building Communities of Hope* tour visited the school on Thursday, Feb. 18.

PINON—"It's often hard to have a discussion about suicide because we are taught to not talk about it. Yet, we need to because it's effecting our communities," Vice President Jonathan Nez said to the students of Pinon High School.

Starting the dialogue is just one issue facing the Navajo Nation when it comes to addressing suicide. However, it's one that the *Building Communities of Hope* tour aims to tackle.

In December of last year, the Office of the President and Vice President (OPVP) undertook a suicide awareness and post-vention initiative called *Building Communities of Hope* wherein OPVP partnered with integral departments and area high schools to spread a message of hope across the Nation.

Since the initial tour, OPVP has been flooded with requests to have *Building Communities of Hope* visit schools that weren't able to schedule the first time around. Most recently, the tour visited Pinon High School on Thursday, Feb. 18.

During the presentation at Pinon High School, President Russell Begaye delivered a message of self-love, self-confidence and kindness. He told the students not to let the opinions and attitudes of others break them down because they are special and loved.

"Be yourself, love yourself and appreciate the people around you," he said. "The more you give of yourself, the more you build yourself up inside. In doing for others, you develop positive self-worth. Each and everyone of you is special," he said.



Students from both Pinon High School and Pinon Middle School attended the *Building Communities of Hope* presentation.

In considering the seriousness of the tour, Pinon High School Principal Lori Chee said she was happy to bring the message to the students.

"It is a topic that we should be discussing, not only with the youth but the community as well," she said. "As such, I invited the middle school to attend because it's something that our younger adolescents need to be aware of as well."

Gary Holiday, Clinical Specialist with the Department of Behavioral Health Services, talked about recognizing suicidal behavior and addressing individuals who are showing warning signs.

"Sometimes when people are thinking about suicide, they give direct messages like stating, 'I am thinking about killing myself'. Sometimes they are indirect and say things like, 'I want the pain to stop' or 'Things would be better without me'. When you can detect these messages, you can start to help these individuals," he said.

Holiday also presented signs to look out for like radical changes in behavior, isolation or when an individual starts to give away their personal objects.

When a person starts to present these messages or behaviors, they are reaching out for help, he said.

"Be direct and don't be afraid to ask questions. Listen to the individual because often they just want someone to talk to. Be understanding, non-judgmental, or blaming. Most importantly, don't give up."



Navajo comedian and motivational speaker, Pax Harvey told the students to talk to somebody if they are in pain and to use the resources provided in the presentation.

As a part of each *Building Communities of Hope* presentation, a motivational speaker always addresses the students. In Pinon, Pax Harvey brought his comedy stylings to highlight a positive message for the kids.

"I know what it's like to be in that dark cloud and feel like there is no hope," he said. "If I can survive domestic violence and abuse, growing up with pain,... if I can survive that, then so can you."

Harvey told the students that drugs and alcohol are not a solution for emotional or mental pain and they can only make situations worse.

"Don't hold in the pain. Talk to somebody about it. That's why we are here today," he said.

At the close of the event, members of the tour along with President Begaye and Vice President Nez, handed out basketballs, footballs and frisbees to the students. Students were also afforded time to get a quick photo with the president and vice president.

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