



National Indian Health Board
**Tribal Oral Health
Initiative**

Each year, the National Indian Health Board's Tribal Oral Health Initiative provides funding to Tribes to sponsor dental therapy health aide students. This year, we were pleased to award six amazing students!



Keana Cruse

**Sponsoring Tribe: Port Gamble S'Klallam
Tribe**

College: Skagit Valley College

Hello, my name is Keana Cruse. I am originally from Seward Alaska, and I am a Chickaloon Tribal member. I moved to Mount Vernon, WA about ten years ago. I have worked in the medical field for over ten years, with a year and a half of experience at a pediatric dental clinic. I love working with and helping people.

I was a CNA for about ten years, and after having children I realized that I needed better hours. I applied for a pediatric dental clinic locally that trained me on the job. I enjoyed working with the children and making their dental experiences positive. I always had good dental experiences when I was growing up, so that makes me strive for those experiences for others.

My grandfather was edentulous by the age of sixteen. I know he had a challenging time eating his favorite foods because of it, and dentures are uncomfortable. When I heard about Dental Therapy, I knew that it was a career that I could get behind.

I want to make the dental experience of my patients the best they can be. Oral health is the front line of overall health, and by improving the experiences of others, we improve the health of our communities. I am proud to be in this program, and I look forward to providing excellent care to my community.



Jessica Greene

**Sponsoring Tribe: Port Gamble S'Klallam
Tribe**

College: Skagit Valley College

Jessica Greene, Makah, has been a community member of the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe for 30 years and just received her 10-year recognition for being employed with the tribe.

Jessica is the mother of four children, and is proud to lead the way by going to college to pursue her dream of becoming a dental therapist.

Her Passion to help people and empathic nature makes her perfect to provide oral health care and OHI education to the Tribal community.



Stacy Lapointe

Sponsoring Tribe: Puyallup Tribal Health Authority

College: Skagit Valley College

My name is Stacy LaPointe. I am 40 years old from the Salish Tribe Swinomish and Blackfoot from Sik-Sika First Nation. My mother is Cheri Gallegos from Sik-Sika and my father is John LaPointe from Swinomish.

I have three children. My oldest son is Shawn who 19yrs old, my daughter is Nevaeh who's 14, and my youngest son Mateo is 9yrs old. I grew up both with the Swinomish tribal community and the Puyallup tribe.

I worked at the Puyallup Tribal Health Authority in the dental department as a dental assistant for 5 years. I'm so honored to be apart of the Dental Therapy program and very excited to see what positive impact in will have for our future generations.



Dana Obey

Sponsoring Tribe: Sault Tribal Dental Program

College: Skagit Valley College

Greetings! My name is Dana Obey, Active member of Sault Ste Marie, Chippewa Tribe, proud mother of four remarkable children and one fur baby. I have dedicated 14 years to dentistry and find great joy in connecting with my community.

Being accepted into the Dental Therapy Program has been a dream come true. Over the years, as a Certified Dental Assistant, I had the honor of mentoring other dental professionals who encouraged me to pursue my dream of becoming a provider.

Naturally, I was hesitant because I have children however the massive amount of emotional support provided by family, friends, Misty Davis, Dr. Drockton, tribal members and faculty have made this transition manageable and incredibly worth the sacrifices necessary to be part of this unique journey! I am blessed to have been offered a spot with in my tribes dental facility to continue serving natives in Northern MI.



Nick Runningwolf

**Sponsoring Tribe: Lower Elwha Klallam
Tribe**

College: Skagit Valley College

Hello there! My name is Nick and I am a Lower Elwha tribal member I have lived in the good-ole PNW my entire life and can't picture being anywhere else.

I have been fortunate enough to be accepted into the 1st CODA accredited Dental Therapy program in the lower 48 and I am currently in my 2nd year! At times it still feels all surreal, sure it can also be a little cumbersome with the rigors schooling/homework but my previous experience as a Dental Assistant has been a great foundation to build upon.

I am truly blessed to be here and receiving a quality education from all the faculty involved. The overall scope of practice of a Dental Therapist is amazing and I know it will only help improve my dental clinic and Tribal community!



Kaela Tyler

Sponsoring Tribe: Makah Tribe

College: Skagit Valley College

My name is Kaela Tyler, I am 26 years old and I am an enrolled tribal member of the Makah tribe out on the Makah Reservation. I grew up and lived out in Neah Bay my whole life up until graduation from high school.

I have worked in the healthcare field since I graduated high school in 2015 and I knew that being in this career field was something I wanted to do as I got older. I've been a dental assistant for 4 years now, I was also a pharmacy technician for a year during COVID.

I was honored to be one of the six people chosen to be a part of the first cohort of the first CODA-accredited dental therapy program in the lower 48.

I am very grateful to receive this scholarship to help me on my education journey so that I can successfully finish my last year in the program. I will be heading back to Neah Bay to work at the dental clinic as a provider which will essentially be giving back to my community in the best way possible.



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**To learn more about the Dental Therapy Health Aide
Student Sponsorship Fund, please contact
Dawn Landon, NIHB Tribal Oral Health Coordinator,
at dlandon@nihb.org or visit
<https://www.nihb.org/oralhealthinitiative/>.**