



Wrapping up and creating change for the Yukwatsistay[^] group in a good way, we will be ending our group services.

By Debra Valentino

These words are written to inform you that the Yukwatsistay[^] group as you know it, has decided to make some changes which mean we are ending our current services to community as of March 24, 2023. Today we are letting you know that as community members we are still committed to you and each other, but will be shutting down the Yukwatsistay[^] group. We are grateful and feel good about all our hard work, and commitment over the years. We do regret that this means no more building at 431 Hillcrest Drive, and we will have a ceremony to put out the Friday Nite Recovery Fire on March 24th, Friday, 2023. This fire ran for these last six years with a few missed fires during the pandemic.

Some history of what we are proud of:

Yukwatsistay[^] (Our Fire, Our Spirit Within Each One Of Us)

Our mission and vision were to support Oneida community members/non-members affected by addiction in their desire to bring hope, create awareness, and promote healing/belonging by means of reconnecting with cultural-based teachings, and their own fire. To have a sustainable, healthier and stronger connected community.

We began like most, a grass roots organized group of people who said enough is enough after losing several to overdose deaths. A committed group, who along the way with many others, wanted to create awareness, support, and effective change in our beautiful community. A change that spoke loud about the opioid epidemic, and how each of us need to help out, while other resources could be developed. This is what the community was asking for at that time. Because we knew that no one group, council, department, can make these changes alone, it takes all of us and will need us all into the future. So, the first thing we did was commit to a 30 day Sacred Fire, that actually lasted well over 100 days and several walk through in community to bring attention to the struggle. That fire transformed our lives and so many others, and here we are now in 2023.

Over these past six years we and so many other volunteers and supporters, have given countless volunteer hours, provided our own dollars, sweat and tears, support, commitment, and dedicated our time to those struggling with addiction, the families, working and networking with others to add more resources and information out to whomever needed it.

Later we established the Sober Gathering Place for Oneida Nation community, we received our Certificate of Occupancy, at 431 Hillcrest Drive, Green Bay, WI, 54313, October 26, 2018. This allowed us to help out in a few ways, first we established our program under the umbrella of DarJune Inc, then as we continued to meet/network with so many we were able to become and provide the Tribal Action Plan for Oneida with one of the first objectives met for their grant cycle that year to aide in what the community also asked for. This small group was scheduled weekly with a 24/7 coverage for the space its first year. We maintained dual coverage for health and safety reasons at all times.

This group became the first ones to be trained as recovery coaches, as well as provided Narcan trainings, to enhance better understanding of what addiction is and what it isn't. Because we fed people to, we had to be certified in Food Safety Handling as well. The Sober Gathering Place, a place for anyone to come for help, with support through various meetings, community exchanges of meals, speaker meetings, cultural presentations, a comfortable place to be welcome no matter who you were as long as you wanted the help even when you were not sure yet. We also had fun providing activities, entertainment, and connecting people together through beading/sewing classes, painting classes, and various other support groups. Providing additional information for prayer circles, sweat lodges, and other ceremonies. We also were proud to provide an Annual Community Appreciation Day each year to say thank you. We had many shared cultural stories, histories, language, and to show we have never lost this, it remains within each one of us. We just had to keep reminding each other.

Yukwatsistay^ was diligent in raising funds to help with shelter, food, gas, wood, and safe emotional supportive needs for many. We want to thank and recognize the following people for their time and dedication to Yukwatsistay^ efforts to help our community, to include but not limited to present and past members: the late Kermit Valentino, Debra Valentino, Frank Vandehei, Gina Vandehei, Dana Isaac, Francine Valentino, Gabryella Valentino, James Sherrod, Cassandra Sherrod, Drew Valentine, Neshoba Maupin, Josiah Porter, Makenit Cornilius, Leanne Laes and family, Mandy Suthers and all of DarJune. This group to give you an idea of how many hours were volunteered over the years, an estimated 12,000 hours easy. We are truly blessed and want each of you to know that we are super proud of all of you and how much you gave to each day, and event, etc.

We also feel the importance of acknowledging those committed to stepping up each time we needed some additional help, we do not want to leave anyone out, so we hope you know that if we missed you, it was not intentional. Six years produced many. Thank you to those for cooking, helping out at fundraisers, community in general for supporting with your dollars for keeping our doors open, paying for utilities, wood, equipment, food, housing for some, and general extras during holidays for families as needed. In-kind donations that helped out as well to help us help out the homeless shelter/parking lot and DarJune's Men and Women's homes.

The first of many Firekeepers that first 100 days, so many people who brought food, supplies, prayers, and there medicines to share with our fire. Robert Brown, Anita Barber, Beverly Scow, Karen Valentino, Nick Valentino, Rosemary Warunek, Kendra Mehojah, Terry Skenandore, Stephanie Skenandore, the late Denise Dodge, Cassie Breault, Elizabeth House, Felicia Valentino, The Watts Family, Paula Jolly, Lutsi Hill, Daniel Guzman King, Michael Goodeve, all our speakers who were brave enough to share their stories and cultural teachings with community during our speaker meetings, Oneida Nation, Land Management, Oneida Behavioral Health, Parrish Hall, Department of Public Works, SAMHSA administration, Wise Women Gathering Place, Oneida Police Department, and countless others who we just want to say, we appreciated each and every one of you.

All in all we may never truly know how many lives we touched, saved, supported, all we know is you were all worth it, and each of those we helped, may never fully understand how they helped us out in each

of our lives. We also extend our continued prayers and love for those we lost over the years, and those who continue in there recovery/healing today, and those we are still there for. Just know and understand that our circle is never ending, but evolving in different ways, and other places today and each day moving forward.

One last thing, our Yukwatsistay^ face book page will remain as this is a space we can still provide positive messages daily from myself and others.

In addition, I did want to mention that we also have two other meetings in the community through Behavioral Health now at the Recovery Nest, Monday and Wednesday nights at 6:00 p.m. every week at Cottage 2. If someone is interested, I am sure maybe some discussion could happen to start a Friday Night fire with them, just a suggestion.

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