

State awards Yurok Tribe \$7.9 million for Yurok Youth Center

January 30, 2023



The Yurok Tribe received a \$7.9 million grant from California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS) to construct a much-needed Yurok Youth Center in Weitchpec.

“The new facility will serve as a one-stop location, where our youth will have access to the culturally informed services and self-empowering support they need to lead healthy, productive lives,” said Yurok Chairman Joseph L. James. “I would like to thank California Governor Gavin Newsom and CalHHS for investing in the future of the Yurok Tribe. This cutting-edge center will strengthen our youth, our families and our community for many generations to come.”

On the first floor of the three-story, 4,320-square-foot building, there will be a calming space for youth, a pantry and an area for group events and classes. The second floor will consist of a private intake kiosk and several office spaces for Yurok Behavioral Health staff, professional therapists and external service providers. The top floor will include: a cultural classroom, game room, a computer station for virtual medical

appointments as well as space for mutual support groups and parenting classes. An amphitheater and traditional sweathouse will be constructed outside of the youth center.

The conveniently located Yurok Youth Center will offer a wide variety of culturally centered services for local youth between 12 and 23-years-old. The services include: clinical services, outpatient treatment for substance use disorder, tutoring and school-linked healthcare services, such as individual and family therapy. Yurok Health and Human Services and other tribal departments will put on culturally relevant community wellness events and youth prevention activities at the center too. The Tribe has found that culture is a potent form of prevention and it will be embedded into all of the center's operations. The building will also contain a legal clinic and a foster care office staffed by personnel who can help youth navigate the justice or foster care systems.

The youth center will be built adjacent to the Libby Haripop Nix Community Center in Weitchpec, the most populated part of the upriver side of the Yurok Reservation. Hundreds of families reside in close proximity to the future facility. Currently, the only youth-serving centers are in Eureka, which is a two-hour drive from Weitchpec under ideal conditions. In the dark, rainy winter months, when depression and suicide risks increase, travelling to one of the Eureka healthcare sites can take much longer as a result of poor driving conditions.

Due to several interrelated factors, such as intergenerational and modern-day trauma, limited access to healthcare services and economic inequities, young members of the Yurok Tribe and many other tribes across the United State experience behavioral health conditions far more frequently than their non-tribal counterparts. To begin addressing this issue, Yurok Health and Human Services (YHHS) Suicide Prevention Program Manager Shoshoni Gensaw-Hostler and former YHHS Clinician Alita Redner, in 2021, applied for and received a \$150,000 grant from the California Department of Healthcare Services' Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program (BHCIP) to start developing plans for the youth center project. In a few short months, they completed a feasibility study, obtained stakeholder feedback, identified a site for construction and developed the initial concepts for the facility. With guidance from the Yurok Tribal Council, Yurok Planning and Community Development Department Grant Writer Ray Moisa and Gensaw Hostler completed the concept design for the new facility and secured the competitive \$7,975,438 BHCIP award for the construction of the green-built center. Yurok tribal youth participated in every part of the decision-making process to ensure the project meets their unique needs. The advisory group will continue to be consulted on all center functions, ranging from the development of childcare services to individual case planning.

"It is extremely important for youth to have a meaningful say in the decisions that affect their lives. We want to empower local teens and young adults to become resilient, independent and successful adults," Gensaw-Hostler said. "For many years, we have needed a youth center in the Weitchpec area and I'm so grateful it is finally going to be a reality."

In the spring, the Yurok Tribe's Per-Geesh Construction Corporation will begin building the new facility. The green building will be constructed with natural materials that are representative of the Tribe's culture.

The Yurok Youth Center funding originated from California Governor Gavin Newsom's \$480.5 million investment in 54 projects to improve California's behavioral health infrastructure for children and youth. Administered by the California Department of Healthcare Services' Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program and part of Governor Newsom's Master Plan for Kids' Mental Health, this historic investment provides grant funding to construct new facilities and expand existing facilities that help children, youth, transition-age youth, and perinatal individuals with a mental health and/or substance use disorder.