

DIANA YAZZIE DEVINE

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT/SOCIAL CHANGE

Diana Yazzie-Devine is a self-described independent spirit, “I grew up loving animals and loving the outdoors and I don’t ever remember being home. You know I was always on the go; back then the Devines had a dinner bell and that bell would ring and I would run home...” Born in Lansing, Michigan, the middle child of seven, Diana moved around a lot because of her father’s career as a football coach. “I grew up in what I considered a compassionate family that led me to be who I am today...it was about people and about your community so I contribute a lot of my lifetime work of serving in the community you know as an example that was led by my parents.”



Diana Yazzie Devine

While attending the University of Wisconsin, Diana was introduced to the tribal communities and ended up doing an internship on the Ojibwe reservation. She lived and worked on the reservation for five years. “I think culture is about living a lifestyle and bringing all that understanding and culture with me, it became part of who I am. So, yes, naturally when I started working here in Phoenix with tribal organizations I wasn’t seen as a tribal member but I was seen as someone who was credible and knowledgeable.” During this time, the Indian Self Determination Act was enacted which gave tribes the ability to negotiate contracts with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to administer their own education and social service programs. A pivotal time in history and an incredible opportunity for Diana, “...I kind of got in on the ground, on the ground of all of those changes and really understanding tribal sovereignty and government to tribe relations.”

In 1979, Diana made her third trip to Arizona to work with Native American Connections, an alcohol and recovery program. Diana knew the traditional treatment model wouldn’t work for the Native people so she tapped into her early relationships with traditional healers. “Our model for recovery was healthy mind, healthy body, healthy spirit and you have those interconnecting three circles that was the first thing that we kind of implemented when I came here... it’s not about quitting drugs for Native American people it’s about healing the trauma, knowing who they are culturally...” As the President and CEO of Native American Connections, Diana has developed a powerhouse organization that has grown from three employees to about 130 and eighteen different sites. Along the way they’ve help create the Native American Community Service Center and added other services like housing programs. “We started with ten beds in a boarding house and having our clients transition to the boarding house and supporting them in what I would consider transitional housing and then we actually bought our first affordable housing community. And you know then we literally had a pathway for people to transition into the community in a supportive drug free housing environment and then we saw great strides in longer term sobriety and

people getting jobs and becoming part of the community.” One of those housing communities bears Diana’s name, Devine Legacy. An honor this humble lady resisted at first, but now she’s proud of what the LEED platinum facility provides. “I’m so excited for people who might be considered low to moderate income people [to] have a fabulous place to live, [to] get to their jobs [and to] sustain their families in a sustainable way...”

While working full-time, and raising three kids as a single mother, Diana earned her MBA from Arizona State University because she felt that even though Native American Connections was a non-profit, it should be treated like a business. “...I would have done it again because it really transformed a lot of my thinking and really helped what I think has led us to be really successful today.”

Diana also spends her time with her five grand-kids, serving on many community boards and is an avid triathlete, recently completing the Arizona Ironman. “To do a hundred and forty mile race is incredible and just making mind over matter, it was pretty incredible.”

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But it’s the family and community values taught by her parents early on that Diana keeps close, “I’ve been able to work my passion and make it my life rather than a job and I think I’m very, very fortunate to have found that.”