

Canoe Journeys

The Canoe Journey as a Cultural Best Practice: Youth Focus Group Responses



An Orca appeared to bless the 2007 Canoe Journey

The inter-tribal Canoe Journey is a traditional gathering of NW tribes that has been resurrected in the past several years. They were initiated in 1989 by a Quinault tribal elder as the “Paddle to Seattle” (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, August 1, 2006). Larger canoe tribes such as the Lummi, Makah, Nisqually, Puyallup, and Tulalip located on Puget Sound, and several Canadian tribes around Vancouver and Victoria, B.C. have also been very active participants in reviving this cultural tradition.

An integral part of the Canoe Journey is the formation of Canoe Families at each tribe. A Canoe Family typically includes local tribal youth, their families and extended families, and other tribal and community members. The Canoe Family meets year round (usually once a week on Friday afternoons at Grand Ronde) to participate in drug-free cultural events and fund-raising to support the annual Canoe Journey.

At Grand Ronde, 2007 is the 5th year some tribal members attended the Canoe Journey and it is the 3rd year the CTGR paddled one or more canoes in this very strenuous and logistically challenging cultural event.

Note: Tribal youth participants and tribal Social Services staff at CTGR report that the Canoe Family and Canoe Journey have become the most successful culturally specific initiative to involve large and sustained numbers of tribal youth in a drug-free activity. It is not unusual for two or more tribes combining to paddle one or more canoes.