



We Are Public Health

We use social media to connect with Native youth.

Like most teenagers in the United States, Native youth use smart phones and computers to stay connected to friends and to what interests them. A multimedia project created by the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board called *We R Native* uses a website, social media, and a text message service to promote health among Native youth.

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www.nwcphp.org/we-are-public-health

Photo courtesy of Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board.

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Like most teenagers in the United States, Native youth use smart phones and computers to stay connected to friends and to what interests them. What if these technological habits could bring Native youth into regular contact with medically accurate and culturally sensitive information about health?

The question isn't a trivial one. As a group, Native youth are disproportionately burdened by many common adolescent health issues, including [suicide](#), [substance use](#), and [sexually transmitted infections](#).

Wanting to learn more about Native youth media use, staff at the [Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board](#) conducted a Native youth media survey in 2009. The results of the survey then guided efforts to secure funding for a multimedia project to promote health and wellness among the Native youth in the Pacific Northwest—and beyond.

A central finding of the Native youth media survey was that participants preferred getting health information from websites that offered a variety of health content, not just content on sensitive topics such as sexual health and suicide. Survey respondents also preferred sites with images, videos, "ask the experts" columns, and music.

This information guided the creation of a multimedia project that could help reverse the health disparities that Native youth experience. The project, called *We R Native*, seeks to promote health while maximizing the importance of Native culture. This holistic approach means that *We R Native* is designed to address the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions of wellbeing in ways that are relevant to Native youth.

In 2011, *We R Native* was launched as a Facebook page. Since then, additional media venues and strategies have been added:

- *We R Native* [website](#)
- *We R Native* text message service (text NATIVE to 24587), for weekly health tips, contests, and life advice
- *We R Native* [Facebook page](#)
- *We R Native* [Twitter feed](#)
- *We R Native* [YouTube channel](#)
- *We R Native* [Tumblr](#)

The website launched in September 2012, and many planned features for the site are up and running. Visitors to WeRNative.org will find an engaging site that features stories of Native culture and opportunities for community service alongside health information. Wendee Gardner, a former project coordinator with *We R Native* says, “We wanted our site to be as engaging and addictive as Facebook—so engaging that you could get lost in it.”

In the future, there will be an interactive map where visitors can click and see where story submissions and community projects originate. At some point, music will be added to the site. Amanda Gaston, Project Coordinator for *We R Native* says, “We have been surprised by how complicated and time consuming website development is. We went into the process with a specific vision and so many ideas. Translating those ideas into programming language (both for the website and the text messaging service) has been much more difficult than we anticipated.”

The Facebook page and text message service alert followers to new internship opportunities and news stories about Native youth. These channels also promote interactivity by encouraging photo and story sharing, contest submissions, and feedback. At this time, *We R Native* staff are not sure if different audiences are being reached by the various modalities they are using. They plan to evaluate the various components of *We R Native* in the coming months, starting with the text messaging service.

Next year, the *We R Native* team will train a cohort of youth ambassadors to write website content, select monthly contest topics, post on the Facebook page, and raise awareness about *We R Native* at local events and at national conferences.

Gaston says, "It's so thrilling to see young people embrace *We R Native* and to see them sharing messages from the project such as *I am strong, I control my body*, and *We can change our world*."

What kind of engagement is *We R Native* getting? The data below provide a snapshot of current interest in the website and related social media.

WeRNative.org—from inception to 7/31/2013

Page views	59,331
Visits	18,601
Percentage of new visitors	72.4
Percentage of returning visitors	27.6
Average visit duration	3:38
Pages per visit	3.19

Facebook—data for June 2013

Reach	19,572
Fans	3009

Twitter—as of July 31, 2013

Followers	461
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Youtube—as of July 31, 2013

Subscribers	60
Views	9618

Text Message Service—as of July 31, 2013

Users	1261
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