

COMMUNITY NEWS/NEW PERSONNEL

Nation's medical center has new community therapist

BY DON DECKER,
YAN News

Christopher Little brings healing skills to the medical clinic and says he likes working with the people. Mr. Little was born in Oregon and then moved to Denver with his parents at a young age. Before coming to the Nation in August of last year, he spent 2 years in Prescott and prior to that, 14 years in Phoenix.

Although his job title is in "mental health", he prefers a more eclectic form of counseling-therapy. "It's about well-being and emotional health," says Mr. Little. With a Masters in Counseling and a Licensed Associate Substance Abuse Counselor and nearing his completion of his requirements to become independently licensed, he feels prepared in meeting the needs of the community through his training and state certification.

Mr. Little also possesses a Bachelors Degree in Media Production which includes knowledge in script writing, video photography, editing, and photography.

Mr. Little's involvement with the Nation's Wellness Court has given him ample opportunities to meet



Christopher Little

clients referred to him through this program. His work involves providing needed services through the Nation's ASA (Alcohol Substance Abuse) program located in another building on the Nation. "They (ASA) make referrals to me, back and forth through the Wellness Program and I am happy to do," he says.

It's the same kind of services he provided at the West Yavapai Guidance Clinic as a therapist and as a liaison through the county's 'drug court' program for 2 years prior to

coming on the Yavapai-Apache Nation.

Mr. Little sees his role as therapist intertwined in the multi-faceted parts of the Nation with contact in all service areas such as housing, ASA, the courts and the health clinic.

Mr. Little is personable and says he enjoys foreign travel and has spent time in Monterrey, Mexico, a week in France and has been to Scotland 2 times where he honors his family roots. "Travel is a passion but I can't afford it," he says with a smile.

He likes to read and his favorite author is American writer Bill Bryson ('A Walk in the woods' and 'Notes from a small island') who writes about the comparisons of English and American life.

Mr. Little's hobbies include photography. "I got a point-and-shoot camera but now I have an SLR camera," he says about his new-found hobby in nature photography using the latest technology. He also has a passion for cooking and has "gone through phases of Chinese, Tai and lately, Italian," he adds.

And for music he enjoys the 60s and 70s classic such as Led Zeppelin, The Who, The Beatles and mixes it up with blue grass and traditional New

Orleans jazz.

About his therapy work, Mr. Little feels a closeness to what he can do for people from all walks of life.

"I didn't get into this kind of work because my life as perfect or that I feel sorry for people. I got into this because I've been through my own journey and that helps me relate to much of what I do," he says.

Mr. Little also views the symptoms of mental health as a universal issue and not just limited to a particular population. "Depression is depression, regardless of (one's) culture. Anxiety is anxiety regardless of culture. And emotions, the feelings, the context changes but the emotions are the same," he said.

Mr. Little applies cognitive behavioral and Motivational interviewing techniques, combined with personal and professional skills to help clients view their substance use and mental health disorders as multi-faceted conditions requiring more than just abstinence from substances.

Mr. Little's office is located at the Nation's medical center in Middle Verde.

New social service director named

BY DON DECKER,
YAN News

Erin Ortega, social worker of YAN was appointed as the new social service director in early December. Mrs. Ortega has been a social worker for the Nation for the past 2 years. Her volunteer duties have included working at the Yavapai County Head Attorney's Office as a Victim Services advocate. Prior to this, for 5 years, she was a state correctional officer working within the penal system at Winslow and at the Buckeye center where she provided leadership as a fire arms instructor, self-defense trainer and as a trainer for the critical response team which serves the professional staff members inside and outside of the prison system. Should an unforeseen event arise, Mrs. Ortega provided staff training which prepared personnel to work with traumatized families of correction officers.

Mrs. Ortega said that correctional officers do not wear firearms inside of the prison complexes.

Her educational background includes a Bachelors of Science in Criminology from Arizona State University with a minor in American Indian studies. These academic credentials and experiences has given her the qualifications to continue in working within the social service system of Yavapai-Apache Nation. During her school years, Mrs. Ortega moved about in New Mexico where her father was a construction worker and living in places such as Almagordo, Las Cruces and White Sands.

Mrs. Ortega graduated from Chino Valley High School in 2001. Mrs. Ortega and partner Lori Ortega, a police officer with the Yavapai-Apache Nation, share 4 children ages 10 months to 19 years of age. With her new role as the director of social services for the Nation Mrs. Ortega sees a need to implement new ways in the delivery strategies for the Nation's clients. Since Mrs. Ortega's tenure as social worker, she has seen many turn overs in the directorship that has affected the services and



Erin Ortega

Photo by Margie Campos

goals of her department. "So, nothing is really streamlined. They made attempts to correct this but they haven't stayed long enough to see their goals reached," said Mrs. Ortega of past directors who moved on from the Nation's social service program.

One of these goals is to provide better food bank services to members who live in the community of Clarkdale. She doesn't see a need to establish another food bank in Clarkdale which would be replicating the services for the Nation at a great expense of finding space and the special features that accommodate a food bank.

This new service would result in scheduling of regular deliveries of food boxes every 2 weeks.

As for the placement of children, Mrs. Ortega is especially adept to the needs of placing children without resorting to finding non-Indian parents as "a last resort". Her ideal model of foster care is one being utilized by the Salt River Indian Community in Scottsdale which incorporates training for potential foster parents in cultural development. "I like the class they do to provide the cultural aspects, especially for non-native foster parents, she said.

Mrs. Ortega said that the rate of foster care placement in non-native homes compared to native homes is 50/50. The placement of tribal children placed in non-native homes is often predicated on the special needs of the child. This could include additional special supervision of that child. Some communities do not have these vital services for children so foster parents are matched up with chil-

dren who require certain services that are located within those communities.

Mrs. Ortega is very confident about the strength of the Nation's program as she supports the strong notion of always bringing the child back to their respective homes to be with their parents, to include the children in the social system of the family. "Often this takes a while and sometimes, accomplished pretty quickly as well," she said.

The Social Service department is fully staffed including elderly advocate, a Child Protective Service representative, the food bank program, tribal assistance and regular social service case management.

As the new director for Social Service, Mrs. Ortega sees the valuable qualifications of those she supervises and is open to seeing new approaches to services. "I wouldn't suggest any changes until I know what they (fellow social workers) do. They have an opportunity to express everything. I really like the staff: they have a good heart and a genuine interest for the common good," said Mrs. Ortega. "To empower clients to where they can choose for their own lives, and nobody knows what's good for them except themselves. If we have all the services (available) we can possibly have, that has a better chance of having people feeling empowered"

Hometown boy of Camp Verde becomes Nation's chief judge

BY DON DECKER,
YAN News

Judge Joel England was born in Iowa and moved to Camp Verde when he was 10 years old. He attended Camp Verde Elementary, Middle School and high school and graduated in 1991.

Judge England brings with him a wide varied professional background that is beneficial to the court system of the Nation.

Judge England shows and enthusiasm for the department he oversees.

"I really like it and enjoy it. I came here when I was 10 years old. Even though I'm not Native American, I've never felt like an outsider. I have felt welcomed working with the people and the staff. It's important for the court to be fair and transparent. That is what we are trying to do," said Judge England.

After high school graduation, Judge



Judge Joel England

England attended the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs graduating with academic distinction in 1995. He then served as an Air Force intelligence officer for three years. After serving as intelligence officer, he was selected by the U.S. Air Force to become a judge advocate and attended law school at the University of Arizona, graduating summa cum laude in 2002. Following law school, he served in a variety

of positions as an Air Force attorney, a prosecutor, defense counsel and as the Professional Responsibility Chief for the Air Force Judge Advocate General's Corps. His last assignment was Senior Attorney at Luke Air Force Base in Glendale, Arizona and retired from the Air Force in July 2016 and was sworn into the Chief Judge's position for the Nation on August 1, 2016.