



Durango Adult Education Center

Serving Southwest Colorado

701 Camino del Rio, Ste. 301
Durango, CO 81301

Return Address Requested

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, December 10:

CoGives Day

Colorado Gives Day is an annual statewide movement to celebrate and increase philanthropy in Colorado through online giving.

Thursday, December 18:

High School Equivalency Graduation Ceremony

Cortez
6 - 7 pm

Thursday, December 19:

High School Equivalency Graduation Ceremony

Durango Public Library
6 - 7 pm

Our Mission

The mission of the Durango Adult Education Center, a caring learning community, is to fill educational gaps by providing the skills and knowledge necessary for livable wage careers, post-secondary education, and social and economic mobility.

To Catch a Dream continued...

Working in tandem, the classes and one-on-one tutoring buoyed Kiniw successfully through the first three GED exams. His fourth and final exam in math is scheduled for October. When he attains his diploma, Kiniw aims to pursue his business plans. He envisions a fulfilling career in providing alternative, all-natural medicines.

These days when not studying, Kiniw spends three or four days crafting dream catchers - a single hoop woven with spiraling beads and decorative feathers. On one recent creation, black and white beads cartwheel like stars around a cosmic center. On another, orange and turquoise imitate flames.

Despite its problems, the world—as Kiniw sees it—is ripe with healing potential. He finds medicine in his artistic pursuits: making dream catchers, music, and poetry along with the fresh air and surrounding wilderness. He also finds healing in the annual Sundance ceremonies with intense fasting and spiritual cleansing. And it's through these medicines and the strong education he is earning at the DAEC that Kiniw immunizes himself from nightmares, catching instead all his best dreams.

Tidings

Fall 2019 Newsletter of the Durango Adult Education Center



**Durango Adult
Education Center**

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To Catch a Dream: Lessons in Hope and Healing

"When I was in second grade, I remember my teacher put me up in front of the class and he told the class that I came from a conquered people. Like that's how he started off the history lesson," Kiniw Cavanaugh says when asked why school was so difficult for him. "I didn't like school very much."

Overt racism was not the only obstacle he faced. The Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) boy spent his adolescence with his Lakota mom and siblings on the impoverished Prairie Island Reservation in Minnesota. As a teen, he moved to Minneapolis and lived in a poor neighborhood with his Dakota dad and half siblings. By this time in the 1990s, Minneapolis's homicide rates were notorious.

"Just going to the churches to go get free food and stuff like that, we'd see bodies in the streets. People with their brains blown out," Kiniw admits. He neither brags about nor sensationalizes his experiences. His words are as tidy and as no-nonsense as the long black braid sliding down his back. Kiniw's participation in school eventually fizzled. A few years ago, his older brother encouraged him to seek better job opportunities in the Four Corners. Kiniw secured work and daydreamed about pursuing a business degree and opening his own company. Unless he could complete his education, he was stuck.

Kiniw affirms, "I grew up seeing everybody in misery and hopeless, but I don't want nothing to do with that. I have more of a purpose, you know."

Initially, Kiniw was excited when he found the high school equivalency classes at the Durango Adult Education Center led to a GED diploma; however, he also worried this school, like all the others, would let him down. "I was a little bit nervous, but I wanted more...I wanted to get it done just so I can hurry up and get to where I need to go," Kiniw says. "I got friends who are always drinking...wasting their lives. I lost a lot of friends to overdoses... a lot of relatives drinking themselves to death."

That he has largely evaded addiction does not surprise Kiniw. He feels immune to it because a tribal medicine man gave his mother herbs to take throughout her pregnancy. Also, his grandmother taught him how to make dream catchers. According to Anishinaabe traditions, dream catchers replicate a spider's web and serve as protective charms.

After Kiniw enrolled at the DAEC, he encountered none of the racism or humiliation he'd always associated with schools. "It's been good here. It's very different from where I come from."

Best of all, the small class sizes enable him to focus better and ask more questions. He even has his own tutor, Tim Miller. Tim began tutoring at the DAEC many years ago and really enjoys it. The Cortez and Durango Centers retain a network of volunteer tutors whose invaluable services are free for students.



Dream catcher

Continued on back page...



Meet our Director

Susan Hakanson, new Executive Director at the Durango and Cortez Adult Education Center, prefers inverted situations where she can stretch into unexplored territory. For instance, with hands flat on the floor, fingers spread, feet pointing to the cosmos, Susan finds insight, clarity, and strength.

"It helps center me," Susan says of yoga, the pursuit she has practiced for 40 years and taught for 20. Sitting in a local coffee shop, Susan becomes animated talking about findings from today's cutting-edge neuroscience research. Recent studies reveal how meditation, yoga, and mindful breathing practices alter and improve the brain's neural networks.

Susan discovered yoga as a teen. With a congenital spinal condition, she spent much of her childhood in body braces and casts, suffering pain. Yoga was proposed as a way to hush her physical suffering; it also rocked her world!



Susan in a yoga pose

Through yoga, Susan found a new way to coexist with her pain. It did not have to disappear in order for her to lead a vibrant lifestyle. And whether she was heading a school district's board, writing grants and fundraising for nonprofits, or overseeing project and finance management for local and regional governments, yoga helped Susan balance life with career.

Susan notes that yoga "is being able to quiet your mind and be present and be calm. And that definitely speaks to what I've done professionally."

continued on the next column...

New Director *continued...*

As a Senior Fellow with the American Leadership Forum, she specializes in servant leadership. The traditional business structure resembles a pyramid with employees at the bottom and a director atop. The servant leadership model inverts that pyramid. Like Susan in a yoga pose, it stands on its head.

"It's about learning to be the kind of leader who is in support of the staff, not in control of the staff."



Susan leading a presentation

In her first months on the job, Susan already admires the team she serves. "The staff is so passionate." Let it come as no surprise that the yoga-instructor-cum-business-leader aims to bring stability to the organization so that its services reach everyone in need. "I want to make sure [the DAEC] is as exceptional as it can be."

Like DAEC and CAEC students, Susan returned to school as an older adult, earning three degrees. "It got harder each time, but I loved it. It was great and it wasn't easy."

Thanks to that experience, Susan feels deep empathy and esteem for the students at our centers. "How do you get back into a math class when the last math class you took was 25 years ago? How do you write a paper when maybe you've never done that...or how do you have the nerve to get your GED when you know that traditional education didn't work for you? You do all that with support. And that's what [these Centers] do for people. They're changing people's lives and also the whole community."

If yoga has given Susan the ability to excel in the unusual, upside down, or unexpected, it has also given her the requisite flexibility needed to be a perfect fit at the DAEC. The symmetry between teaching yoga and running the premier adult education centers in the Four Corners region is as surprising as it is apt. Both situations involve helping people to gradually shift their bodies, spirits, and minds to radically change their lives.

As Susan puts it, "Look at your life and understand it's never too late to make a change."

Thanks to Your Support...

Word Play: Using language to Get Ahead of the Game

In the virtual world of video games, the odd wormhole plunges brave characters into utterly foreign worlds. In that world, displaced characters must acquire resources and allies to survive.

Neither wormholes nor magic spells brought Yan Yan Zhu to a remote corner of the world where she had no friends, didn't speak the language, and could not read any signs around her.

"I came for love," Yan Yan explains why she moved to the U.S. early last summer.

She was working in Shanghai, China as a top video game designer when she fell for a Four Corners man. Because he spoke some Chinese and she knew only a few English phrases, the couple flirted primarily over Google Translate.

Once she was married and living in Cortez, Yan Yan knew she could not rely on a device to get through the day-to-day. "I am an optimistic person," she says. "I want to get a job. I want to make friends."



Yan Yan and her husband

She visited the library and discovered that the Cortez Adult Education Center, a satellite of the Durango Adult Education Center, offers English as a Second Language classes.

"My teacher, Ms. Peggy, taught me really well!" Yan Yan attests of her ESL teacher.

Feeling welcomed and emboldened by her growing English skills, Yan Yan went to her local grocery and asked if they were hiring. Asked to bring a resume, she sought help from Mary Fuller, the CAEC's Career Advisor. Mary helped Yan Yan craft her resume and cover letter.

At both the Cortez and Durango Centers, Career Advisors facilitate Building Opportunities and Occupations for Self-Sustaining Transitions (BOOST). BOOST encompasses an array of targeted services available to all Durango and Cortez Adult Education Center students and alumni. The program is designed to assist students eliminate the barriers preventing them from attending classes, learning English, earning a high school equivalency, or advancing careers. Career Advisors assist with resume writing, interview practice, job shadowing or internship opportunities, and more.



Yan Yan in the Four Corners area

Now equipped with a steady job, Yan Yan is thriving like one of the imaginary video game characters she used to create. With some encouragement, Yan Yan has volunteered to lead a Chinese Conversation club at the CAEC.

Beginning in October, anyone interested in learning Mandarin, as well as fundamental aspects of Chinese culture, can enroll in Yan Yan's language club.

As Yan Yan sees it, her language club is an essential means of erasing misconceptions and stereotypes. Before relocating, Yan Yan's understanding of Americans and their attitudes came from Chinese media, which didn't paint a pleasant picture. "It made me nervous before I came here. The people here are very nice to me. Very friendly." She suspects many Americans might feel that same baseless fear about China and its peoples.

Although Yan Yan still has lots to learn, reducing her language barriers has enabled her to design and develop her own virtually limitless reality.