

**Presentation to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples James Anaya  
Ya Ne Dah Ah Tribal School, Chickaloon Native Village, Alaska**

**April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012,**

**“The Power of our Women”**

**Presentation by Sewa Carmen, IITC and Chickaloon Village Youth Speaker (age 14)**

Ensedokda Sewa suzetdelan dinkie dakdodeen.

Hello. My name is Sewa Carmen and I am in the 8th grade at Palmer Junior Middle School. My mom is Shawna Larson and my dad is Gabe Carmen.

First I would like to recognize and thank my ancestors, who survived a lot of things for me to be here today. I would also like to recognize the elders from my community and other Native communities who are here today as well as all my relatives. Tsin'aen.

On my Mom's side I am Ahtna Athabascan from Chickaloon Village and Suqpiat from Port Graham. On my dad's side I am from the Yaqui Nation which is located in Arizona and Sonora Mexico.

I started attending Ya Ne Dah Ah School at Chickaloon Village when I was two in the Tribal daycare and preschool program. Now I am in the local public school in Palmer. Ya Ne Dah Ah, which means “our ancient teachings”, is the only tribally operated school in the State of Alaska. We learn math, reading and writing, but we also learn Athabascan culture, history, language, stories, sewing, beading, fishing, and hunting. The goal of the school is to teach our Ahtna culture, language and values to new generations.

When I went to public school I began realizing how the lessons about our Tribe and our culture would help me in everyday situations. I really appreciate what we were taught about having respect for teachers, elders, other kids and the land. My parents put me in public school so I could learn to walk in both worlds. That way I can understand where my People have come from and what they went through so I could be here today. And I can also understand what we need to do to protect what they left us – the land, the animals, the fish, the forest and our language and culture. These are the things that will keep us strong.

My ancestors were strong men and women. The women on both sides of my family went through a lot but they also knew how to survive and keep their spirits strong, even when it was hard for them. I know that they passed on their strength to me and the other young people in my family. My Yaqui great grandmother who the family called Nana saved herself and her little brother by hiding behind a big rock when she only was 12, almost the same age as I am now, and soldiers killed her family and the village in a fight to take their land. That was in 1912 in Nogales right near the border between Mexico and Arizona. Nana would still dream about that when she was an elder, and she would wake up crying about it, remembering how it was. But she was always so sweet and kind and loving, that's what my dad and grandma say. She stayed strong all her life.

By surviving she made it possible for my grandma, my dad and me to be alive. And she didn't only save herself, she saved her little brother too. She didn't run away, she protected him. She was so brave. I think about that when I see my little brother Tawe. I hope I would be brave like that too.

On my mother's side, in Alaska the women in our family and Tribe were strong too. My aunt Katie Wade and my grandma Helen kept our language alive, even though the settlers tried to take all the kids away to boarding schools where they would not let them speak our language. My Aunt Katie's mother who was named Annie hid her away when the people came to take the children away from Chickaloon to the boarding schools. That way she kept the language strong, and then she started the Ya Ne dah Ah School to teach us kids in the Village the language again. If it was not for Aunt Katie, too much would have been lost forever for our Village.

My mother Shawna Larson and my grandma Andrea Carmen are both are strong women too. They are fighting for our human rights at the United Nations and around the world and also here in Alaska. My grandma helped to write the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Now we can use it to help defend our land rights, culture, subsistence, spirituality and self-determination. My grandma taught my mom to do that work when she was just a teenager, and now my mom is teaching it to me. Now I am learning from both of them about how to stand up and defend our rights.

We are using all those rights now to fight against a coal mine that Usibelli wants to open up in our traditional lands that will cause many problems for Chickaloon. The coal mine would destroy the land and culture that our ancestors worked so hard to protect. I know we have to carry on that work, to support our elders, and do our part as young people.

That's how the women in my family have helped me to be strong. They passed down our culture and language and also the fighting spirit to protect our rights and way of life. I want to thank all the women in my family and in all of our Native families who been brave and worked so hard to protect our cultures, our families and our land. They are why I am alive today and I have learned so much from them.

Someday I can pass these things down to my own daughter and granddaughter. We are like a strong river that rises and falls, is always connected and will never stop flowing.

Tsin'aen