



Bernadette Kniffin, Nnee-Bich'o Nii Director, Bernadine Ruiz, Assistant Director, Florinda Thorne, Program Bookkeeper

The Nnee Bich'o Nii Program Staff was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation on Wednesday, October 19, 2011 at the 2nd Annual Transportation Partnership Meeting held at the Apache Gold Casino & Resort. Bernadette Kniffin, Nnee Bich' o Nii Program Director presented the award to in recognition of their diligence and dedication for meeting and exceeding their goals. The aim was to meet a 20% Work Placement Rate set by the State of Arizona but through countless hours of hard

work, the team managed to exceed that number and brought it up to 31.7%.

Nnee Bich'o Nii (N-neh bi cho nee) means "Helping the People" in Apache. The program, formerly known as TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families), began on May 1, 2008 with overwhelmingly grim statistics. The program began with 1 director, 1 supervisor, 1 transit driver, 4 case managers and 2 vans. They were faced with an average caseload of 989 cases (the total number of families receiving cash assistance in San Carlos) and a Work Participation Rate of .89%. There were no client participation or employment placements to speak of. Over the next three years, through the relentless efforts of Ms. Kniffin and a staff of equal dedication, they turned the numbers around.

Ms. Kniffin proudly shared a department update and the latest statistics released by the federal government. To date, the program's staff has grown to 4 Administrative members, 6 Employment & Training Counselors, 2 Transportation Office members and 8 drivers for a total of 20 employees. The transportation department has a total of 10 vans fully equipped with 2-way radios and GPS locators. The average caseload has dropped considerably to 358. Both numbers are quite impressive but do not begin to compare to the improvement of the Work Placement Rate. Three short years ago, this number was below 1% but today it has risen to an astonishing 31.7%. To paint a different picture, in 2008 there was an average of 8 out of the 989 families working or pursuing an education. Today, there are at least 120 program customers who are employed, volunteering, and attending classes at the local colleges or in training programs. There have been 655 work placements which simply mean that these customers are employed with an average pay rate of \$8.88 per hour with some as high as \$15.00 per hour. Ms. Kniffin points out that the program "walks the talk" by hiring 7 former TANF customers, 1 National Indian Again Program client and 3 REPAC clients; 50% of the current program staff. This astounding improvement has made it possible for the State of Arizona to approve the Tribe's application to run the program for another 3 years.

Always looking to the future, Ms. Kniffin reported that the department will continue to grow with the creation of more staff positions. The transportation department will be receiving 3 more vans by December 2011. Within the next year there will be a 20-passenger and 25-passenger buses made possible through an ADOT 5311 grant for Gila County.

Although, Ms. Kniffin commended her staff for a job well done, the progress made would not have been possible had it not been for the long hours she put into the program. The overall success can be summed by with a simple quote from John C. Maxwell: "People buy into the leader before they buy into the vision." Congratulations to the Nnee Bich' o Nii Program.