

Native American Heritage Month

A SALUTE TO THE PROFESSIONALS WHO SUPPORT THE TRIBES

This month we honor Native American Heritage Month and join in paying tribute to the rich ancestry and traditions of Native Americans. Katrina Decorah is a member of the St. Croix Tribe. The St. Croix Tribe includes more than 1,200 members over four counties in Wisconsin. Katrina and her husband, Josiah, live in Burnett County with their family and she enjoys sewing, beading, and spending time with her family. "My husband and I own a small business and we have met so many amazing, inspirational people through that," Katrina said. "We also have had the opportunity to attend some great events that way, and we just recently won "the outstanding business of the year" award from the Indigenous Business Group in Wisconsin."

Katrina has also been serving as a memory care coordinator for the St. Croix Tribe for the last year. "I have always enjoyed working with elders in the community and there is a need for this support," Katrina said. According to the Alzheimer's Association, by 2060, the number of American Indian/Alaska Native individuals aged 65 and older living with dementia is projected to increase four-fold. Katrina also has a personal connection to Alzheimer's and has lost a grandfather and an aunt to the disease, and has an aunt currently on this difficult journey.

Having a Conversation about Memory Loss

"There is a lot of stigma with dementia," Katrina said. "Often tribal members aren't ready to do a memory screen. It's scary to put yourself out there. Also, many times tribal families prefer to utilize services within the tribal community. My position is helping find resources both within and outside of the community, such as adult day services or respite care services."

"I always stress that early diagnosis is very important and helpful to the whole family," Katrina said. "A lot of times families delay diagnosis and planning, and think they won't live long enough to be bothered by Alzheimer's (According to the Alzheimer's Association, more than one-third of Native Americans say they do not expect to live long enough to develop Alzheimer's). "But if families don't face a diagnosis, they may find they don't know what the family member would have wanted, in terms of financial planning or their wishes for care. I encourage families to have some of those difficult conversations, while their loved one can still be involved in decisions."



Katrina Decorah
Memory Care Coordinator
St. Croix Tribe



Katrina and her husband Josiah. Katrina is wearing a jingle dress or healing dress. Her husband is wearing a men's woodland regalia.



Katrina and her daughter, Jocelyn.

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Katrina does a lot of outreach with the Tribe. She conducts home visits and has booths at community events, educating about signs to watch for with memory loss. She also connects families with resources, including some grant options to help families with resources. "We have a small and close-knit community so people know I'm there if they need me," Katrina said. "Memory loss is a scary topic though, and some people want to avoid the entire subject."

"I have a big focus on prevention when it comes to brain health," Katrina said. "Things like socialization and attending pow wows, and going to diabetic prevention programs help with overall health." Each month Katrina hosts a "Save Your Brain" program in two locations, and she also works with other tribal dementia care specialists for combined programs, including a book club and tribal caregiver connect program, which addresses caregiver burnout and highlights successful strategies for caregivers. She also helped coordinate bringing a one-act memory play, Fortune Cookies, to the Tribe to help open the door to conversations about memory loss. "My favorite event to host is Dementia Live events," Katrina said. "It creates empathy and understanding. I even offer it in the home."

Wisconsin has eleven federally recognized Native American Nations and Tribal communities. The Alzheimer's Association Care and Support team supports these communities with education programs to increase awareness of dementia.



Katrina worked with St. Croix Tribal Health and Human Services to Coordinate a small powwow.



Katrina, her husband Josiah Jr. and son Josiah III.



Katrina with friend, LCO Tribal Elder and Artist, Roberta Crowe.