

JAMESTOWN S'KLALLAM TRIBE: A SUCCESS STORY

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Controlling our Destiny: Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe sees exponential growth of health care services for their Tribal citizens and local community.

Persistence and passion for the health of their people has led to massive growth for the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe.

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By Betsy Barron

“The Tribes that are most successful are the ones who went out and just started doing things. Those Tribes have decided they can control their own destiny. We’re not a Tribe that sits around and talks about things. We’re a Tribe that does things. And I think that’s at the core and way of thinking for Self-Governance Tribes. They’re doers. They don’t demand that somebody else do it, they’re saying, ‘Just get out of our way and we’ll do it.’” - Brent Simcosky, Health Director at Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe (JST).



Jamestown Family Health Clinic

The Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe (JST) is headquartered in a small town called Blyn on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state. “S’Klallam” is a Salish term for “The Strong People.” The Tribe’s history shows that they have always been self-reliant and determined to forge their own path. JST has long been recognized as a progressive Tribe, now wholeheartedly rooted in the 21st century, but with a deep connection to their traditional resources, history and culture, which inform the present and serve as the foundation of their success.

The work JST has done for their citizens was truly built from scratch. The Tribe’s Chairman/CEO is W. Ron Allen who has been at the helm of the Tribe steering this ship for 47 years. According to Chairman Allen, Tribal Self-Governance and opportunities provided under the Affordable Care Act/Indian Health Care Improvement Act (ACA/IHCIA), have been critically important tools allowing them allowed them to expand and elevate both the quantity and quality of healthcare services they can provide to their community. Self-Governance has allowed them to do a great job retaining quality talent and allowed them to become a solution for quality healthcare in their surrounding community. Opening their own Tribal clinic paved the trail for new models of providing healthcare in their community, and thinking outside the box has proven quite successful. Chairman Allen adds that “with our control, we’ve been able to address the true need of not just the Tribe/Tribal citizens, but the extended family and the employees who serve and live around us.” But he notes that “it just doesn’t happen overnight, it takes purpose, persistence, and patience.”

Most people who have worked with and witness Chairman Allen in action know him as a strong leader for his people and a fierce, long-time advocate for Tribal Self-Governance. JST was one of the first four Tribes who entered into Self-Governance with Indian Health Service in 1994.

“We built our Tribal clinic not realizing we were going to maximize this capacity. Currently, we have no room for more people,” Chairman Allen comments. JST does not just serve its 530 Tribal citizens and over 1000 employees, but their entire community of over 20,000 people throughout northwest Washington (including non-Tribal citizens). Although the needs are overwhelming, JST is seen as a major source of healthcare services in the area. Beyond just improving the health of their community, they have also seen a change in the self-esteem of their whole community. “We help Jamestown by helping others,” Mr. Simcosky shares.

“We’ve always believed that we can make a difference and that we are going to be successful. We’re focused on that goal.”

– W. Ron Allen

Chairman Allen explains that “we’ve been able to create a healthier community and enhance the longevity of people’s lives. I think that by being in control yourself, it elevates your self-esteem and the community self-esteem. When you can do things that help your people be proud of who they are as a people and who they are as a citizen of your Tribe, then you’re raising the level of the self-esteem of the whole community, along with the individuals themselves and the family.”

Among their many successes include designing and building a robust primary care clinic, which has allowed them to successfully learn how to recover their reimbursement rate and save Purchased

and Referred Care (PRC) dollars for other programs. For Chairman Allen, primary care is the foundation upon which to build other services, like the launch of construction on their new dental care facility, which will triple JST's dental care services. "Any Tribal citizens that need to get in that day, they get in. Then we track different population health measures, like blood pressure and glucose level... and it has made a huge impact on people's health," Simcosky adds.



Jamestown Family Dental Clinic

When asked for advice to share with other Tribal leaders considering Self-Governance with Indian Health Service (IHS), Chairman Allen shared that they only took what was rightfully their fair share: "Be persistent about your goal of securing your fair share. Be patient. It's a different concept. I'm simplifying, but other people think we don't have the skill set to manage these kinds of programs. Learn how IHS distributes money and identify your eligibility and respective Tribal funding. Tribes really need to know how to negotiate and to push the envelope about in identifying their fair share. Be firm and be determined to get your Tribal share."



Floor plan for new expanded Jamestown Family Dental Clinic

Simcosky added, “Every Tribe has a different thing that drives them. I think it’s important that Tribes don’t have to be cookie cutter. Just be your own Tribe. Look for opportunities. It’s not so much what you want to do as what your culture is. You must have a culture that’s geared around ‘we can self-govern, we can set our own priorities, we can set our own goals’ and that’s really what you want to go by at first!” Mr. Simcosky also charged Tribes with a call to focus on young leaders, who often may not even know the history of how Tribal Self-Governance and the ACA/IHCIA came to be. Transitioning to the next generation of young leaders is key in continuing to preserve Tribes’ right to self-govern successfully.

Chairman Allen sums it up by noting that “self-governance is exercising our sovereignty and here to stay. Part of that reason is because the sophistication of Tribes has grown so exponentially. We are not the same Tribes of 40-50 years ago. Self-Governance and Tribal leadership today have proven our ability to execute, recruit the talent, and make decisions to move the needle of quality healthcare.”

