

Tillie Torpey

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Future Teacher Connects with Heritage at WSU

Name: Tillie Keyonnie Torpey

Tribe: Coeur d'Alene

Hometown: Plummer, ID

Degree/Major: Bachelor of Education, Elementary Education

Why did you choose WSU? I chose WSU because I saw a lot of opportunities for myself that I could take advantage of considering professors I knew, financial aid, and that it's close to home.

What did you enjoy most about being a WSU student? Being a cougar, my best experience was meeting the great people that I know now and being involved to learn more about myself. Being away from my home on the reservation, I thought I would have lost myself, but in reality I learned more than ever about myself as a Native woman, mother and as a teacher. Being here I was able to really connect with my heritage by being placed in a completely different culture with different people.

What activities/programs were you involved with while at WSU? McNair Achievement Program, Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program, Coalition of Women Students, Native American Women's Association, Native American Alliance, Mitamitaga O'Samoa, Ku-Ah-Mah, and WSU Leadership Sports STEM Camp.

Did any particular WSU program make an impact in your success as a student? I would have to say two programs had an impact on my life. The McNair Achievement Program strengthened my academic skills in being a stronger student. They also helped me find my passions in finding my purpose as a student and finding passions with my life. As for the Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program, they provided me a home and family away from home. They also provided me more opportunities in being connected with the Native and academic communities.

What was your biggest challenge to achieving your education and how did you overcome it? My biggest challenge was a lot of things. From being separated from my daughter for four years, losing my second baby, grandfather, and brother, to finding my own way in the education program as a Native teacher. These were some of the hardest things I've had to ever deal with throughout my life, but the way I overcame them was simply staying connected to my roots. A lot of praying, singing, going to sweat and seeking support from my friends and family.

What are your future plans? My future plans consist of becoming a teacher in Cusick, WA, and enjoying and appreciating time with my family. In the long run I want to eventually earn my masters in administration and doctoral degree in indigenous epistemology.

What advice would you give a freshman? To a freshmen I would tell them to get involved as much as they can to understand their purpose in their life but also as a student. Once you understand that, everything else will come easier.



Tillie Torpey, Coeur d'Alene tribal member, pictured here with her daughter Jayda. Torpey received her bachelor's in Elementary Education.

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