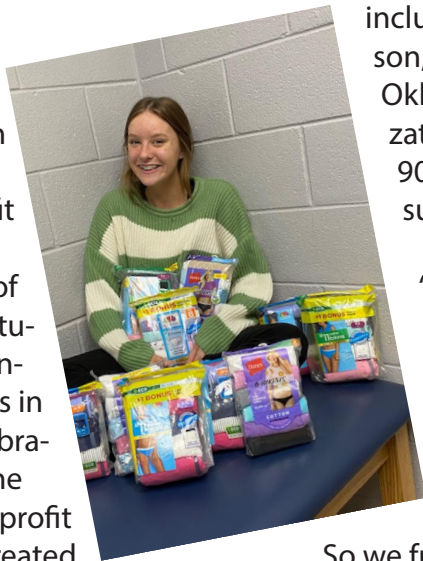


THIS NATIVE WOMEN-RUN NONPROFIT IS PROVIDING PERIOD SUPPLIES TO INDIAN COUNTRY



Even before the pandemic exacerbated inequities, one in five teens in the U.S. struggled to afford period products or were not able to purchase them at all, according to at least one study commissioned by a nonprofit organization and a period underwear company.

Eva Marie Carney, a citizen of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, started the nonprofit The Kwek Society in 2018 with the goal of supporting Native students with their menstrual product needs in a dignified and celebratory way. In 2018, The Kwek Society, a nonprofit organization, was created.



Kwe'k means "women" in the Potawatomi language, so it is The Women's Society. It has a 10 member board of directors, 8 of whom are indigenous women.

The Kwek Society provides menstrual supplies to schools and community-based organizations with significant Native populations. The

organization operates in 12 states, including Oklahoma, as well as in Ontario, Canada. Carney advises that "we are always ready to add new partners in order to ensure that no student or community member misses school or work because they lack needed menstrual supplies." In Oklahoma, The Kwek Society serves rural, suburban and city residents, including students in Mason, Nowata, Shawnee and Oklahoma City. The organization has provided almost 900,000 individual period supplies so far.

"We believe that just as there are books in school libraries, and food in school cafeterias, there should be period products in school bathrooms.

So we furnish those products to help young menstruators maintain their dignity and good school attendance," Carney said.

Early on, Carney received help from some fellow tribal citizens who designed moon time bags that the organization now distributes across Indian Country. Carney reported: "We call them 'moon time' bags because

many Native women refer to their period as their 'moon time.'" The bags, made of colorful cotton fabric, are sewn by supporters and stuffed with pads and liners. Each bag comes with a message of celebration from The Kwek Society.

The Kwek Society is based in Arlington, Virginia, and ships from there most of the period supplies to the many states the organization supports, Carney said.

In Oklahoma, the nonprofit is working with the following schools: Mason Public Schools, Nowata Public Schools, Pleasant Grove Public School, Shawnee Public



Schools, Oklahoma City Public Schools and Sovereign Community School. It also is partnered with Community Renewal of Pottawatomie County, which operates in Shawnee. In June 2021, The Kwek Society stocked Community Renewal's two friendship houses — homes staffed with full-time community coordinators to support neighbors in restoring their community from the inside out — with moon time bags, so that community members have period supplies available when needed.

In recognition of its work in the local community, The Kwek Society recently was granted a significant donation by the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, whose tribal headquarters are near Shawnee.

In addition to providing supplies, the organization also shares on its website and in its newsletter what Carney calls "beautiful and empowering traditional stories about menstruation told by indigenous people."

To learn more, subscribe to its news-

letter, request help for your school of community organization, or donate, visit kweksociety.org.



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