



Arlita Rhoan

## Begin with the children

"If this old lady can do it, you can, too." That's Arlita Rhoan's message to her five children and eleven grandchildren as she follows her goal of earning her bachelor's degree under a new program that's creating higher education opportunities for Native Americans in Oregon. The cheerful 69-year-old, who says she's positive from the minute she wakes up each morning, is passionate about raising good citizens, carrying on the culture and language of her tribe, and helping young people find a future through education. "It's *the* key to their success," she believes. "Back in the '40s, we lived according to our culture, but we've lost our language, and our kids, like all kids, are dealing with drugs, alcohol, and other issues...and many don't have goals."

Arlita says she is proud to be a model and a mentor for kids of any age. "We've seen with other tribes that the more education they have, the more they are respected – in their tribal communities, outside the reservation, and in Washington, DC, where they're making policies that affect us." She adds, "I realized if I'm going to tell kids that higher education is important, I needed to experience it for myself."

Arlita and 55 others on the Warm Springs Reservation who work with young children hope to change that by working toward associate's and bachelor's degrees through the Higher Education Partnership, a program providing support for students and researchers to discover the best methods for helping rural reservation dwellers access higher education. Arlita is balancing classes in early childhood education and algebra with her job in the Culture and Heritage program, where she teaches young children Ichishkin, one of the three Warm Springs native languages. She says her fellow students in the partnership are learning to be leaders, giving guidance to their young people, opening doors of opportunity. "If we want to change, we must start with the children," she says. Her fellow students work in the Early Childhood Education Center, Culture and Heritage program, and the Tribal Human Services office.

"The Warm Springs Tribal Council approached us about improving access to education," explains Sharon Rosenkoetter, associate professor in human development family sciences who shares leadership of the program with Clint Jacks and Ramona Tanawasha. "We were able to create a partnership with the Confederated Tribes, OSU, Central Oregon Community College, and the Cascades Center for Community Governance. Significant support comes from the U.S. Office of Head Start through the National American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start Research Center in Denver. Classes are offered on the Warm Springs Reservation and online with support for tuition, books, child care, and tutoring built in. "All are non-traditional students," explains Sharon, "ranging in age from 20 to 69. Most are parents and grandparents, working full-time jobs while they juggle the demands of family and community responsibilities. Their tenacity is remarkable."



Tribal generations