

# ✦ Pala Youth Empowerment Initiative ✦

## HONORING STRENGTH, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY

December is a great time to lift up our youth, celebrate culture, and connect through learning, healing, and community.

### Message from the Pala Youth Empowerment Staff

The Pala Housing Resource Center staff just wants to give a big thank-you to our youth and their families for all your support. You're the reason this program keeps growing, and we truly appreciate you. We're proud of our youth and their resilience, and we're excited to keep giving them the tools they need to grow and succeed.

**SAVE THE DATE**

**17 DEC**

**2025**

**PALA COMMUNITY FAMILY CHRISTMAS PARTY**

**PALA ADMINISTRATION | 4:00PM - 6:00PM**

## YEAR IN REVIEW



This year has been full of memories, growth, and milestones. As we wrap up, we are grateful for every connection, experience, and opportunity that made 2025 unforgettable.

## LOOKING AHEAD ✦ ✦ ✦

As we wrap up the year, we're also excited for what's coming next year. Our driving school program continues to grow, and our youth community garden is in the process of being built. We can't wait for all the new memories, teachings, guest speakers, activities, and field trips ahead.

## SPECIAL MESSAGE

*"Christmas is not as much about opening presents as it is about opening our hearts."*

# Resilience in Winter



Winter is traditionally a time of reflection, storytelling, and strengthening community ties. For youth, especially here in Southern California, this season is more than just colder nights, it's a time to slow down, reconnect, and refocus. Winter can symbolize:



## Restoring balance

Taking a step back from the busyness of life to reset your mind, body, and spirit.



## Connecting with elders and traditions

Listening to stories, learning cultural teachings, and spending time with family and community.



## Building inner strength for the new year

Using this quiet season to prepare for the opportunities and challenges ahead.

We encourage youth to spend time listening to cultural stories, asking questions, and learning from family or community members. If your family participates in winter ceremonies or gatherings, this is a great time to be present and take in the teachings being passed down.

## What Resilience Means for Youth

Resilience is the ability to keep going, even when things get tough. For Native youth, resilience is more than just “staying strong,” it’s about:

- Holding onto your identity and culture
- Learning from challenges instead of letting them stop you
- Using the teachings of your ancestors to guide you
- Finding positive ways to move forward, even during hard times

Growing up, building resilience helps you face school pressures, life changes, and personal struggles with confidence. It teaches you how to bounce back, stay grounded in who you are, and continue walking your path with strength. Resilience isn't something you're just born with; you develop it through experiences, community support, cultural teachings, and believing in yourself.

For youth in Pala and across Southern California, resilience is part of who you are. It comes from your ancestors, your family, and your traditions. Winter is a perfect time to reflect on that strength and carry it with you into the new year.

# Cultural Spotlight:

## Winter Stories & Teachings



### “THE COYOTE WHO LEARNED TO LISTEN”

Long ago, in the hills and valleys of what is now the Pala area, Coyote loved to wander. He was curious, energetic, and always ready to explore. But Coyote had one big problem: he didn't like to listen. One winter, the nights grew colder, and food became harder to find. The animals gathered to share teachings from the Elders about how to prepare for winter, where to find certain plants, how to move safely through the mountains, and how to look out for one another.

But Coyote was too busy playing and jumping around to pay attention.

One day, he decided to sneak up the mountain alone to find food. The winds were strong, and the trails were covered with cold fog. Halfway up, he slipped on a loose rock and tumbled down the hillside. Embarrassed and cold, Coyote sat at the bottom, shivering.

As he sat there, Owl, the quiet observer of the night, landed on a nearby branch.

“Coyote,” Owl said gently, “the winter teachings are not just stories. They're lessons to guide you, so you don't have to learn everything the hard way.”

Coyote lowered his head. “I didn't think the stories were important,” he admitted.

Owl nodded. “The stories are how we remember. They tell us how to move through the world safely and respectfully. If you listen, they will help you grow.”

The next night, Coyote joined the circle of animals. This time, he listened carefully.

He asked questions. He learned about the land, the plants, and the ways to travel safely. And when the animals needed help gathering food the next day, Coyote was the first to offer his paws.

From then on, Coyote still explored, but he also listened. As a result, he became wiser, stronger, and more connected to his community.



### Renewal & Preparing for the New Year

Even though winter feels like a quiet season, it's also a time of preparation.

- New growth comes from rest
- Strength comes from balance
- A new year brings new responsibilities
- Youth are always learning, growing, and finding their path

## Winter Teachings

### Slow Down & Reflect

As the nights grow longer, winter encourages us to take a step back, breathe, and reflect on the past year, our choices, our growth, and the lessons we've learned.

### “Everything Resting Has a Purpose”

Winter is the time when the earth rests so it can bloom again. The plants slow down, the animals move carefully, and even the nights stay longer to remind us to rest our minds and spirits.

### Winter teaching encourages youth to:

- Take care of their mental and emotional health
- Slow down when they feel overwhelmed
- Remember that rest does not mean weakness; it means strength

Use winter as a time to recharge and get ready for new opportunities

# Mental Health & Wellness Corner



## TAKE CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

### WELLNESS TIPS FOR THE SEASON:

- ✓ Attend cultural gatherings
- ✓ Take breaks from screens
- ✓ Practice grounding or smudging
- ✓ Reach out to trusted adults when stressed

December can be challenging for many young people. Remind youth:

- It's okay to ask for help
- Cultural practices can support wellness
- Community connections matter

When winter hits, some people start to feel extra tired, sad, or unmotivated. This is sometimes called the Winter Blues, and it's actually pretty common.

Why does it happen?

There are a few ideas, but the biggest reason is less sunlight.

With shorter days and longer nights, our bodies get confused. Less sunlight can mess with:

- our sleep schedule
- our mood
- our energy
- even our appetite

When our natural rhythm gets thrown off, it can make us feel down, stressed, or anxious.

What does it feel like?

Everyone is different, but some common signs are:

- feeling sad or "blah"
- being tired all the time
- wanting to sleep more
- not feeling like doing things you normally enjoy
- headaches or low energy

Is it something serious?

Sometimes the Winter Blues can be mild, but they can also be a sign of a more serious condition called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This is a type of depression that happens mainly in winter. If you're feeling really down, overwhelmed, or not like yourself, it's important to talk to someone you trust, a parent, elder, teacher, counselor, or doctor.

# Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD):

## More Than the Winter Blues

As the days get shorter and there is less daylight, you may start to feel sad. While many people experience the “winter blues,” some people may have a type of depression called seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

The first step is to determine how much your symptoms interfere with your daily life.

**Do you have mild symptoms that These activities can make you feel better:  
have lasted less than 2 weeks?**



Feeling down but still able to take care of yourself and others

- Having some trouble sleeping
- Having less energy than usual but still able to do your job, schoolwork, or housework



- Doing something you enjoy
- Going outside in the sunlight
- Spending time with family and friends
- Eating healthy and avoiding foods with lots of sugar

**If these activities do not help or your symptoms are getting worse, talk to a health care provider.**

**Do you have more severe symptoms that Seek professional help:  
have lasted more than 2 weeks?**



- Social withdrawal
- Oversleeping
- Gaining weight
- Craving foods with lots of sugar like cakes, candies, and cookies



- Light therapy
- Psychotherapy (talk therapy)
- Medications
- Vitamin D supplements

For help finding treatment, visit [nimh.nih.gov/findhelp](https://nimh.nih.gov/findhelp).

If you or someone you know is in immediate distress or is thinking about hurting themselves, call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at **988** or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

# Pala Tobacco Program

“Traditional tobacco carries the prayers of our ancestors. It’s our responsibility to keep its teachings alive, so future generations in our Native communities continue to walk with respect, culture, and purpose.”

## THIS PAST YEAR

As we look back on the past year and all the work the Pala Tobacco Program has accomplished, we know there is still so much more to do. We’re continuing to seek community input on what you’d like to see from the program and how we can build a stronger coalition together. Our goal is to make our efforts more culture-based, especially for our youth. Your voices guide our direction, please feel free to share your thoughts. Happy Holidays from the Pala Tobacco Program!

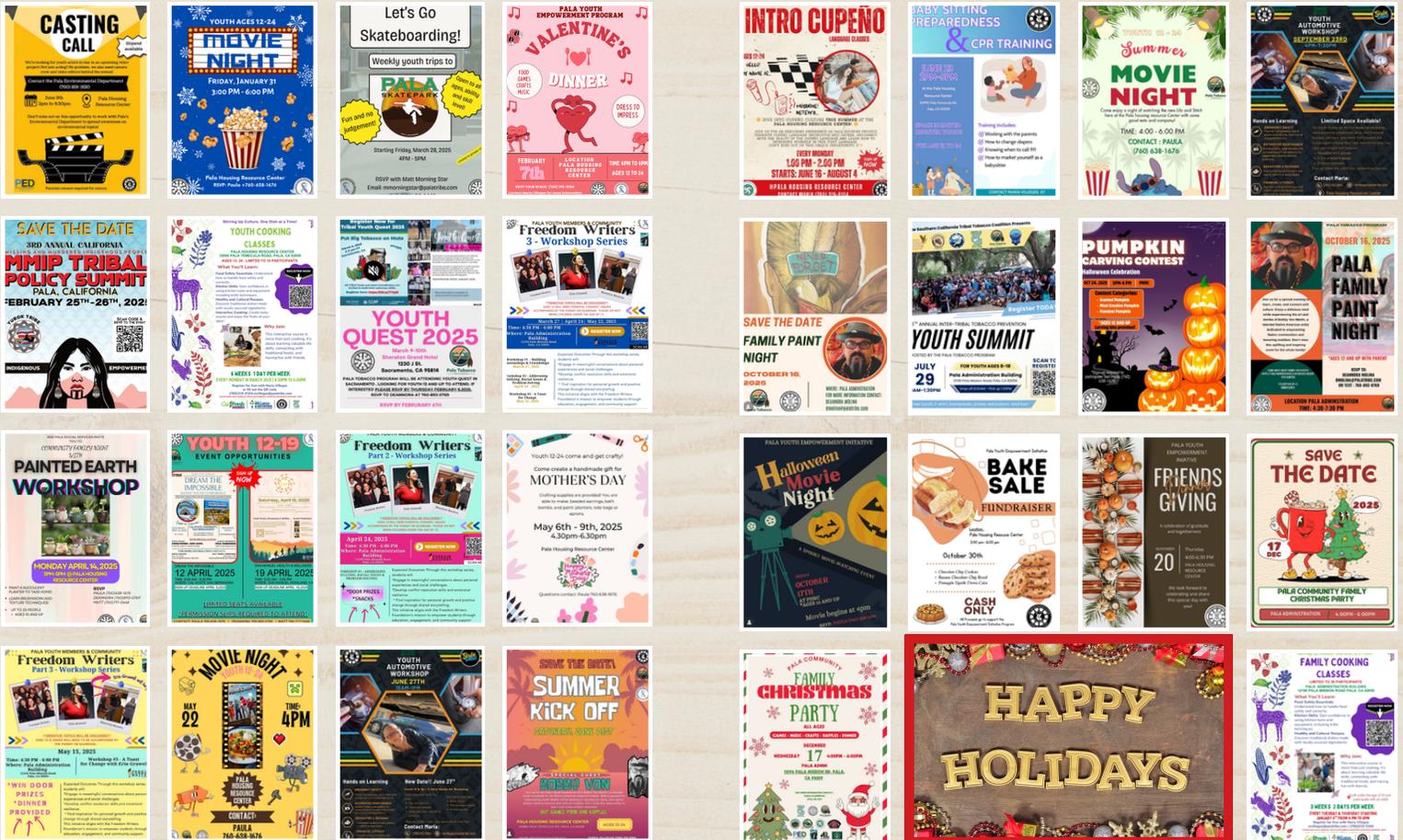


# SPECIAL RECAP OF 2025

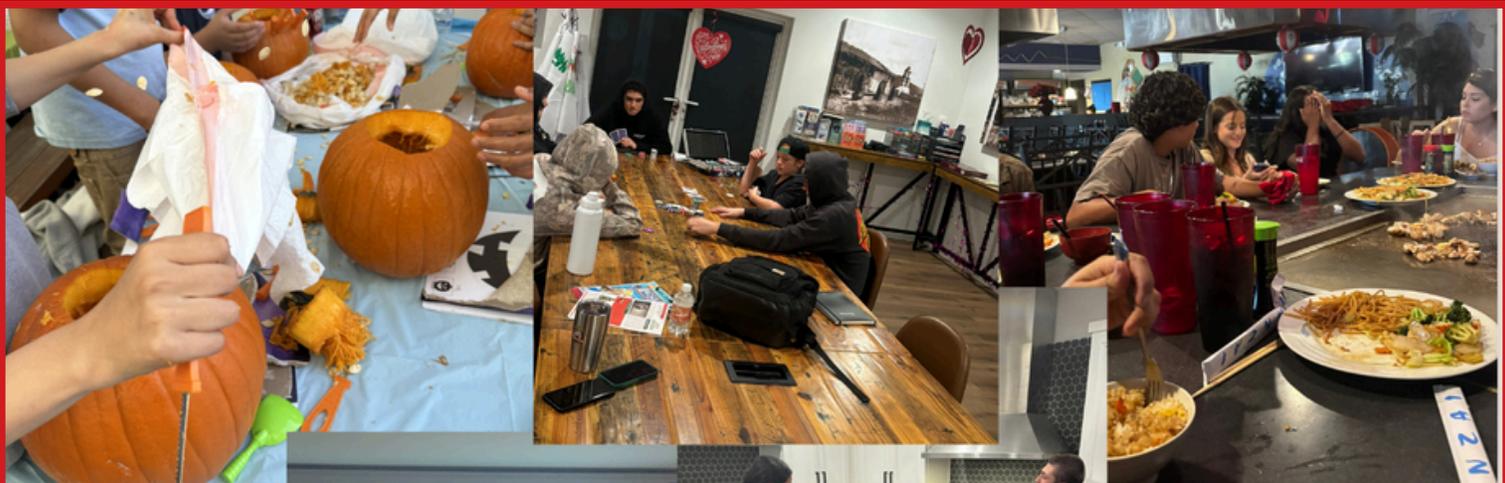
This year has been packed with events. The Pala Youth Empowerment Initiative Program either hosted or collaborated to engage youth and families in these activities. We accomplished a great deal this year!

Thank you to the youth and families for being involved and taking part.

Happy Holidays!













Pala Youth Empowerment Initiative  
**We Are Open**  
**December Hours**

*December Schedule*

Monday - Friday 10:30 am-7 pm  
Closed Dec. 24th, 25th, 26th, 31st and Jan. 1st

*For Any Questions*

Contact Maria Villegas  
(760) 315-0104



Pala Housing Resources Center Presents

## DRIVING LESSONS

Calling all youth 15 and up to come get your driver's license with one-on-one behind the wheel training



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



SCAN ME



REGISTRATION NOW

Contact: Maria Villegas  
(760) 315-0104

TRTS Registration

**REGISTER NOW**

The Pala Housing Resource Center is calling all youth 15 and up to join the waiting list for driving school. Let's work together on getting our youth safely on the road.

PALA COMMUNITY

# FAMILY CHRISTMAS PARTY

ALL AGES

GAMES - MUSIC - CRAFTS - RAFFLES - DINNER

DECEMBER

WEDNESDAY **17** 4:00PM - 6:00PM

PALA ADMIN

12196 PALA MISSION RD, PALA,  
CA 92059

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:  
PAULA ELLENWOOD  
(760) 638-1676



Pala Youth Empowerment Initiative Program

## DRIVING SCHOOL STUDENTS

HONORING OUR ANCESTORS  
YOUTH PRESENTATION



**HONORING OUR ANCESTORS:  
Protecting Our Future**  
Traffic Safety For Native American Youth

**CALLING ALL TRIBAL ORGANIZATIONS & PROGRAMS!**

TREDS is addressing a serious issue in Indian Country: **Traffic Safety.**

Our project was built with the voices of local Kumeyaay & Luiseno youth (ages 16-24), inspired by local artists, storytellers, elders, and speakers.

Led by Kumeyaay student and coordinator, Alexa Casanova, we're ready to share our curriculum with the community through our four local tribal Peer Trainers.

**Let's protect our youth and honor our ancestors together.**

**WHAT WE OFFER:**

- Engaging, culturally influenced presentations
- Youth-led peer-to-peer learning
- A curriculum rooted in tribal assessments and traditions

**Contact: Alexa Casanova**  
arcasanova@health.ucsd.edu

**WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR:**

- Tribal programs
- Youth centers
- Community organizations to host our Peer Trainers and bring this message to your clients and youth!



Attention youth participating in online driving education programs:PHRC is offering a culturally rooted traffic safety presentation designed to help you better understand your online driving program while learning about safety within tribal communities.

January 21 from 4:30 to 6:30 pm  
At the Pala Housing Resource Center



Stirring Up Culture, One Dish at a Time!

## FAMILY COOKING CLASSES

LIMITED TO 30 PARTICIPANTS  
PALA ADMINISTRATION BUILDING  
12196 PALA MISSION ROAD PALA, CA 92059

**What You'll Learn:**

**Food Safety Essentials:** Understand how to handle food safely and correctly.  
**Kitchen Skills:** Gain confidence in using kitchen tools and equipment, including knife techniques.  
**Healthy and Cultural Recipes:** Discover traditional dishes made with locally sourced ingredients.

REGISTER NOW



**Why Join:**

This interactive course is more than just cooking, it's about learning valuable life skills, connecting with traditional foods, and having fun with friends.



Youth under the age of 12 must participate with an adult.

**3 WEEKS 2 DAYS PER WEEK**  
**EVERY TUESDAY & THURSDAY STARTING**  
**JANUARY 6<sup>th</sup> FROM 4 PM TO 6PM**

Register for free with Maria Villegas  
mvillegas@palatribe.com / (760)315-0104

THIS MATERIAL WAS FUNDED BY USDA'S SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM - SNAP.



## STIRRING UP CULTURE, ONE DISH AT A TIME! FAMILY COOKING CLASSES

3 Week 6 classes  
Recipes for 30 Participants

**TUE. JAN. 6TH**

Pumpkin Stew & Acorn Bread

**THUR. JAN 8TH**

Acorn Dumpling Soup with Ground Meat & Cole Bread

**TUE. JAN. 13TH**

Coastal Salmon Black Berry Salad & Creamy Chia Cacao Pudding

**THUR. JAN 15TH**

Walleye Chowder (with talipa instead) & Fry Bread with honey mesquite

**TUE. JAN. 20TH**

Venison Meatballs with Mushroom Sauce & Wild Rice

**THUR. JAN 22ND**

Prickly Pear Marinated Quail Mesquite Rub & Pine Nut Mush

**SURVEYS**

Pre-survey will be conducted on Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>

Post survey will be contacted on Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup>



# PALA'S SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

FURTHER YOUR EDUCATION THROUGH THE PALA LEARNING CENTER

Dreaming of a brighter future but worried about the costs? The Pala Tribal Scholarship Program is here to support enrolled tribal members like you in achieving your goals, whether you're pursuing college, vocational training, trade school, or junior college. Invest in your future with the support you deserve!

## WHAT YOU'LL GET:

- ✔ Covers 75% of tuition and 100% of books and fees
- ✔ Access to free and low-cost tutoring resources
- ✔ Discounts and special offers on school supplies, technology, and more
- ✔ Academic support every step of the way

 **ROLLING APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**APPLY NOW!**

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**  
[rhjohnson@palatribe.com](mailto:rhjohnson@palatribe.com)  
 760-742-1997



# SAVING BRAINS, SAVING LIVES:

## COMMUNITY AWARENESS EVENT



**DECEMBER 11, 2025**

**PALA ADMINISTRATION BUILDING**  
 12196 Pala Mission Rd, Pala, CA 92059

**4:00 PM-6:00 PM**

**LIGHT DINNER WILL BE SERVED**

Learn about brain health and how substances affect this.

**OPEN TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND FIRST RESPONDERS**

Pala Learning Center

## Report Card Program

### How it Works

1. **Bring it In:** Drop off a copy or photo of your report card at the Learning Center anytime after you receive it. Before submitting, stop by the front desk to get an Approval Form from Learning Center staff. A parent or guardian must sign this form, and then staple it to your report card to confirm your entry.
2. **Quarterly Drawings:** We hold a prize drawing four times a year (Each report card = 1 entry into our prize drawing):  
 Fall Drawing – October  
 Winter Drawing – December  
 Spring Drawing – March  
 Summer Drawing – June
3. **Quarterly Bonus Challenges:** Each quarter, we will have a challenge on the Report Card Dropbox. Put your answer in the box along with your report card and signed Approval Form for an extra entry!
4. **All report cards with signed Approval Forms dropped off before the drawing date are included!**

### How to Find Out if You're a Winner!

We will have 3 winners each quarter! Students can come by the Pala Learning Center and pick out their prize! Winners will be announced on our Instagram page @palalearningcenter and posted on the Report Card Dropbox until the next quarter.

Need a little extra support? Contact our Academic Assistant, Rhiannon, for questions or tutoring resources  
 760-742-1997 or [rhjohnson@palatribe.com](mailto:rhjohnson@palatribe.com)

# Members Only Club

## 2025 NORTH COUNTY Super Show



*Postponed due weather and safety concerns. New date set for January 10, 2026*

**PALA**



# Pala Youth Empowerment Initiative



**“For Youth By Youth”**

## WHO WE ARE

The Pala Youth Empowerment Initiative is based on a "For Youth by Youth" approach. We encourage youth to actively be involved with the newsletter, content, training's, podcasts, and activities. We service youth ages 12 to 24 years of age. We strive to provide Pala youth with the life skills needed to become successful adults. Hours of operation Monday through Friday from 11 am-7:30 pm and every other Saturday from 9 am -5 pm

## Meet the Staff



### MARIA VILLEGAS

Youth Empowerment Lead  
Cell: (760) 315-0104  
Email: [mvillegas@palatribe.com](mailto:mvillegas@palatribe.com)



### PAULA ELLENWOOD

Youth Empowerment  
Cell: (760) 638-1676  
[pellenwood@palatribe.com](mailto:pellenwood@palatribe.com)



### DEANNDRA MOLINA

Tobacco Coordinator  
Cell: (760) 893-0769  
[dmolina@palatribe.com](mailto:dmolina@palatribe.com)

## OUR SERVICES

### Life Skills

- Cooking Classes
- Driving School Budgeting
- Workshops
- Resume Building

### Personal Skill Development

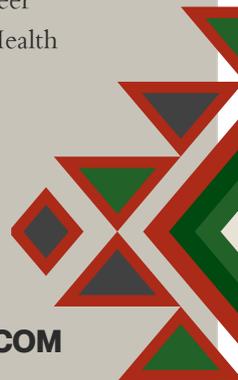
- After School Tutoring
- GED Classes
- Goal Setting
- Community Service

### Community Events

- Youth Training/Field Trips
- Community Outreach
- Social Media

### Other Services

- Mentorship Guidance and Career
- Development Youth Mental Health
- Guidance



PALA YOUTH EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE  
"FOR YOUTH, BY YOUTH"



Merry Christmas

Location:

35990 Pala Temecula Road Pala,  
CA 92059

[www.PalaHRC.com](http://www.PalaHRC.com)

Youth Contact:

Maria Villegas

(760) 315-0104

[mvillegas@palatribe.com](mailto:mvillegas@palatribe.com)

Paula Ellenwood

(760) 638-1676

[pellenwood@palatribe.com](mailto:pellenwood@palatribe.com)

Deandra Molina

(760) 893-0769

[dmolina@palatribe.com](mailto:dmolina@palatribe.com)

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The Pala Tobacco Program is dedicated to inspiring and motivating our community, especially our youth, to learn and honor the traditional use of tobacco. Our mission is to promote a culturally forward mindset, ensuring that our traditions are preserved and respected in today's world. By reconnecting with our roots, we strive to build a healthier future for generations to come, keeping our traditions alive for a long time to come.