Sherri Cornett has been active in the Billings community for years. She was a key organizer at the 2018 Sky Pride parade and created a safe space for LGBTQ individuals to participate. After the recent graffiti at Grace Church, she became involved in the Billings community to promote safety and inclusion. Through her work with Native education, advocacy, and leadership, she has helped bring the community together.

Marci McLean is the executive director of Western Native Voice, an organization that promotes Native education, advocacy, leadership, and community engagement. She has served on the Montana Human Rights Commission and was a member of the state's Indian Affairs Commission. She has attended the Rural Leadership Montana program and sharpened her understanding of the issues faced by indigenous communities.

Marci McLean is a member of the Blackfeet Nation and holds a BA in communication studies from Montana State University Billings. She has worked on legislation related to Native American interests, including the issue of land title claims and the treatment of Native American remains. She has also worked on the Women's Policy Leadership Institute and is a member of the Montana Women's Equality Coalition. She is married to a Shoshone-Paiute man and has two children, a daughter and a son.

Marci McLean: What makes you feel good about being in Billings?

Sherri Cornett: Seeing people coming together and taking action. When the coffee shop owner downtown made a racist comment, people stopped going there. And, when our community reasserted itself, people got involved and made the work seem real. In 2013, I attended Montana Race Dialogue workshops at Grace Church, which were really experiential workshops on the history of immigration in our area. It opened my eyes to how non-indigenous people might be treated. I think we need to understand where we come from and how we connect to family, the land, the power of words and forgiveness.

Marci McLean: After initial uproars, our community seems to be coming back together for the Big Sky Pride parade. How is our community coming back together?

Sherri Cornett: There continues to be discrimination and racism in our area, and we still have much to learn about how to promote Native education, advocacy, leadership, and community engagement. Our conversation wandered through our past, the things around us, we would be more connected, but our past, the things around us, we would be more connected.

Marci McLean: What have you learned from your time in Billings?

Sherri Cornett: I used to not engage, but I went through some small election jobs for Cobell, Pat Kennedy, and now you. I was hired as the director in 2014. It mattered and I came to believe that my vote really does matter. I was quick to move on and, yes, it never really goes away. I think we need to understand where we come from and how we connect to family, the land, the power of words and forgiveness.

Marci McLean: Why do some people have to perpetuate so much hate and discrimination?

Sherri Cornett: I think we need to understand where we come from and how we connect to family, the land, the power of words and forgiveness.

Marci McLean: How do you respond to hateful actions … and words.

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Marci McLean: How do you navigate the topography of racism and sexism.

Sherri Cornett: It seems like you have to be vigilant in navigating the topography of racism and sexism. We often do not realize that what we are saying might be hurtful to someone.

Marci McLean: Why do people support others who are different?

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