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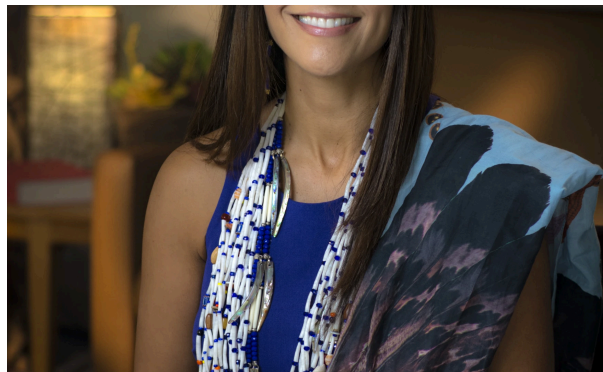
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# Meet American Indian Heritage Month Local Hero Joely Proudfit

KPBS | By KPBS Local Heroes Project

Published November 1, 2016 at 3:00 AM PDT

This story was published more than 7 years ago.



*Ron Stein*

Portrait photo of American Indian Heritage Month Local Hero Joely Proudfit

In response to the question, “Where are you from?” CSU San Marcos professor Joely Proudfit says, “I’m Luiseño/Payomkowishum. I prefer to be addressed that way.” Proudfit heads the university’s American Indian Studies department and the California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center.

Proudfit grew up in a single-parent home, moving around a lot throughout Southern California. She lived with her father for a short time after her mother was incarcerated,

“With luck, and the kindness of others – especially teachers – I graduated high school. I’m the first person in my family to graduate high school, much less get a doctorate [in American politics and policy].”

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Proudfit’s main goal after finishing high school was to find a place to live. She told a recruiter from CSU Long Beach that’s why she planned to join the military after school – to have a bed. That’s when she learned about dorms, and opportunities to get more education and a career in the CSU system through its forgivable loan program.

Now, she’s earned tenured professorships at three universities – the only person she knows with that distinction in the CSU system. And Proudfit stays dedicated to ensuring students have more opportunities than she did, especially American Indian students.

As a student at CSU Long Beach, Proudfit was able to get by from her work ethic, as well as the kindness of others. She received bed sheets, and seats at holiday tables when the dorms closed. Now she aims to ensure her students get the support they need.

These commitments earned Proudfit the title of American Indian Heritage Month Local Hero.

In addition to being an esteemed leader in the Native community, she’s insanely busy with a growing list of projects, including [California's American Indian and Indigenous Film Festival](#), the largest festival of its kind in the state. It celebrates its fourth year in November.

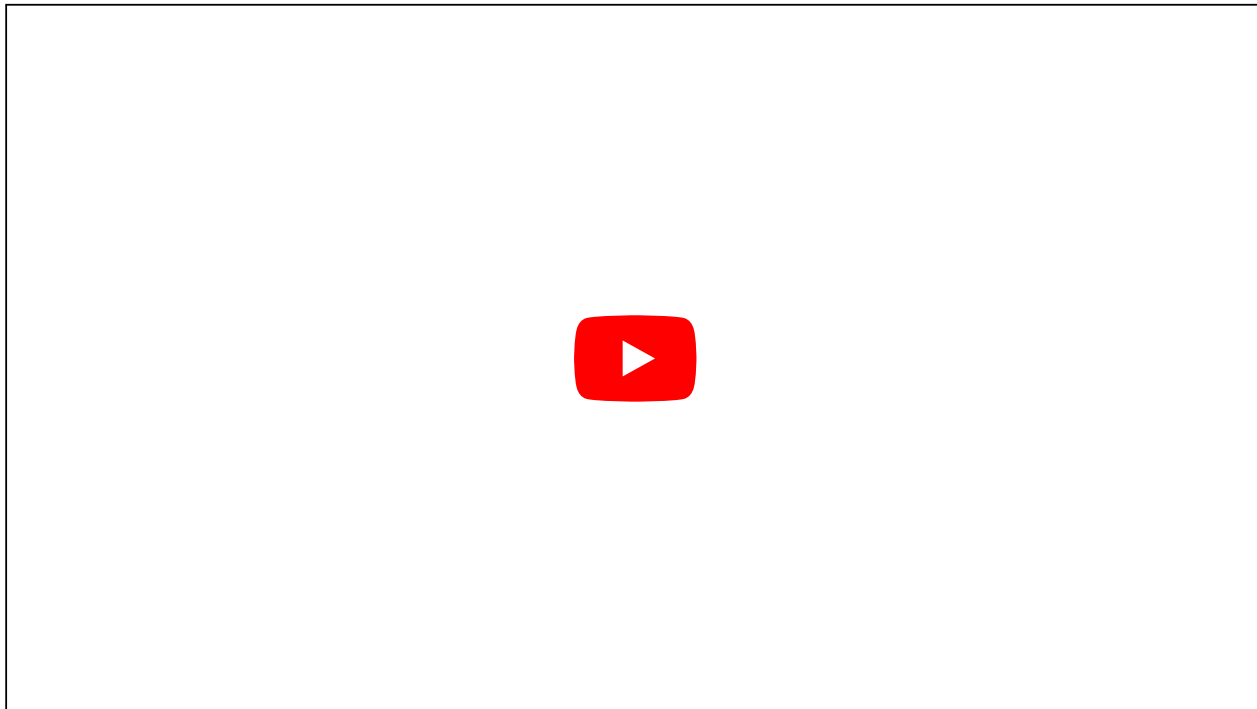
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Proudfit argues that media “is the fourth branch of government,” with an influence that

spends much of her time working in media and encouraging her students to do the same – to take control of how they're represented.



See past American Indian Heritage Month [honorees here](#).

Meet fellow 2016 honoree [Randy Edmonds](#).

Corrected: May 16, 2024 at 10:17 PM PDT

Questions or comments on this story can be directed to Nate John at [njohn@kpbs.org](mailto:njohn@kpbs.org).

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