Tleena helps women use their cultural teachings to get fit. In kickboxing, like making moccasins, she teaches putting intention into the activity.

"I teach them to place intention on themselves when kickboxing, to think about knocking down their fears, worries, or insecurities."

Culture, Kickboxing, AND Confidence

It's a Winning Combination!

Tleena Ives used cultural teachings to lose 100 pounds.

In 2008, Tleena Ives (Port Gamble/S'Klallam) was a newly divorced mother of four children. She remembers how she felt about herself: "I had no confidence, no goals, no motivation, no desire. I had lost myself," she says.

What Tleena did have was her Coast Salish tradition of relying on family and being spiritual in times of need.

Relying on Spirit and Family
She recalls praying with her cousin Kari. "We said a prayer together," recalls Tleena. "Then she said to me, 'You relied on your ex-husband for your value. You need to realize you already have value.'"

Inspired by the prayer and her cousin's words, Tleena decided to join a month-long canoe journey that visited many Pacific Northwest tribes. "I made a promise to eat only traditional foods and lost 17 pounds."

Doing the Work
The weight loss gave her confidence. "I'm going to lose 50 pounds," she said out loud to family and friends. She joined a weight loss program and lost 25 more pounds. She started walking and running: 5Ks, 10ks, half marathons, marathons. The weight kept coming off, and Tleena lost a total of 100 pounds! In 2011, Tleena completed her first Iron Man Triathlon.

Tleena says, "I look at running as my new medicine. It helps me have a clearer mind. With each step and each breath, I focus on what I am thankful for. I say a prayer for each of my children."

Learning from Moccasin Making
Just like the prayer with her cousin, Tleena relies on cultural teachings to help her be inspired and strong. She finds ways to honor the teachings by weaving them into her daily life and her workouts.

"I think of the traditional teachings of moccasin making that my late Aunt Candi taught me. She taught me to put love in my work. She taught me to put a prayer, an affirmation, and a good thought into each stitch for the person you are making the moccasins for."

"The teachings help me with running. In 2012, I ran a marathon on an injured knee. My body was aching and my knee was in pain, but I put one foot in front of the other, like making one moccasin stitch after the other.

"When I work out, I put love, praise, and appreciation into my children and my amazing family. I also put love into myself. As I work out, I am thankful for my heart, pounding strong. I feel the pulse in my toes, hands, and legs. It reminds me that I am alive. I become thankful for the health I have to move, breathe, and feel my heart beating."

Tleena started her fitness journey in 2008. She had just gotten a divorce, and did not feel good about herself. "I wondered how I would provide for my children," she recalls.

Now Tleena owns a fitness business and says, "I like who I am. That's what I want to teach my children. I want them to know how to love themselves."

Here are tips Tleena shares for losing weight and getting fit

1. Know you already have value, just as you are. You are a unique, precious human being, and are meant to be happy.
2. Start with a small goal, one that you can achieve.
3. Say your goal out loud to friends and family members.
4. Try praying for someone while you walk or work out. It is a way to take care of others as you take care of yourself.
5. Share your story with others. Inspire others to join you in becoming fit.

Knowing Your Purpose

Using traditional teachings to help herself stay fit and be motivated continues to help Tleena. "I try to tune into the voice of God and have courage. I ask, 'What is my purpose?'" This focus on her unique abilities and her life's purpose has motivated Tleena to open her own fitness gym for women. "I believe that being fit and helping others get fit is what I am meant to do."

Helping Others

Since opening her gym, Kaia F.I.T. Kitsap, Tleena has built a membership of over 40 women, many of whom are tribal members. She says she can really relate to how women feel about being overweight, not being physically fit, and lacking self-confidence. "I want women to know I can understand their struggle. I've been there. I know what it takes to find yourself, and feel good again."

Tleena is the owner of Kaia F.I.T. Kitsap, a gym for women. She is a certified kickboxing instructor and fitness trainer.

Her digital story of her weight loss journey is on the web on YouTube, entitled "Tleena's Paddle."

She shares her story to help other women lose weight, get fit, and feel good about themselves.

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