



Vision on the Wind

A publication of the Division of Indian Work

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The road to recovery intersects with culture . . .

DIW to offer chemical abuse care

The Division of Indian Work (DIW) has been awarded an \$800,000 grant spanning four years to create a culturally-specific recovery program for urban American Indians living with drug and alcohol dependency.

The grant comes from the Minnesota Department of Human Services Chemical Health Division and the new DIW program will focus on American Indians who have completed chemical dependency treatment but who need help maintaining their sobriety. It will serve American Indians, ages 13 and older, living in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

“We are honored to have this opportunity. The need is clear in our community and we know American Indians increase their chances of a successful recovery when they become immersed in the Native culture. We will create a ‘healing forest’ to help heal the community, the family, and the individual,” said Noya Woodrich, executive director of the Division of Indian Work.



The Division of Indian Work's new chemical dependency recovery program will work to create a 'healing forest' to help heal the community, the family, and the individual.

The new DIW program will be modeled after the national White Bison, Inc. Wellbriety Movement which teaches that traditional Native culture is prevention and promotes a sober lifestyle balanced emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

The DIW program will recruit and train volunteer recovery coaches and match them with individuals and families who need help. Clients will take part in weekly talking circles (support groups); monthly cultural ceremonies, such as the sweat lodge; and drum, dance, and regalia making classes.

There will be support groups for both adults and teens. For instance, adults will focus on the 12 steps from the American Indian perspective of the Medicine Wheel. Two youth groups — Sons of Tradition and Daughters of Tradition — will work to prevent substance abuse. Elders from a variety of tribes will teach

youth about the impact of chemical dependency not just on the individual but on the family, the community, and the nation.

The Division of Indian Work will welcome community referrals and also use its existing family of social service programs to refer individuals and their family members to the chemical dependency recovery program. Currently the Division of Indian Work offers urban American Indian families prenatal and parenting classes, after-school tutoring, family violence counseling, a food shelf, and a loving foster home for Indian children.

“DIW has a 55-year history of offering help and has built a strong relationship with urban American Indian families. We have earned the trust of the community and we are unique among American Indian organizations for blending Native culture with modern methodologies for behavior change and social service,” Woodrich said.

While there are some chemical recovery programs for American Indians in the Twin Cities, they are woefully inadequate based on the need. In Hennepin County alone, 25 percent of the nearly 11,000 American Indian adults reported binge drinking in a county survey.

The DIW chemical dependency program will begin this summer hiring staff and training recovery coaches. It hopes to match clients to coaches and begin talking circles in late fall 2008.



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DIW mission statement

The Division of Indian Work empowers American Indian people through culturally based advocacy, education, counseling, and leadership development.

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DIW youth math project mixes math and culture

American Indian children in the Minneapolis Public Schools have the lowest math scores in the district. Finding that unacceptable, the Division of Indian Work (DIW) has launched the American Indian Math Project — tutoring that focuses solely on math and uses Native culture to teach abstract math concepts.

And in its first school year, there already are signs it's working. Spring teacher surveys regarding Native students who took part during the 2007-2008 school year indicate 100 percent of the 5th graders and 80 percent of middle school students showed academic improvement in math.

Dominic, a 5th grader in the math project, said he didn't think he'd ever say he likes math. "I like math now. The way they teach — it makes sense."

The three-year project began in fall 2007 with a \$250,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Education. Tutoring sessions take place after school at Anishinabe Academy, a Minneapolis public school, and serve American Indian students in grades 5-10. Their parents must also agree to participate twice monthly to learn how they can help their child study math at home.

In all, there are 40 students participating twice per week. Each class session has 20 students and four teachers giving the classroom a teacher-to-student ratio of 1-to-5.

The teachers are trained in the Minneapolis Public Schools' math curriculum, cooperative learning, and in American Indian learning styles.

So how does one teach math using the Native culture? A traditional star quilt, for instance, is used to teach area and perimeter. The making of hand drums is used to teach measurements. Navajo rug patterns teach the fundamentals of geometry such as line symmetry and angle rotation. Traditional teaching methods, such as studying multiplication and division flash cards, also are used.

Many of the tutored students have, for one reason or another, developed a defeatist attitude toward math. Teacher creativity and persistence are key.

Earlier this fall, the students used Navajo rug patterns to begin the process of understanding geometry concepts such as symmetry, angle rotation, reflection, and translation. A week later teachers passed out a standard math sheet using those same concepts. The anxiety in the room skyrocketed.

"Hey, I thought this was supposed to be fun - not work," cried out one 5th grader as she stared blankly at the math sheet, shaking her head.

But as the students worked through the math sheet, and their teachers connected it back to their lesson on Navajo rugs — you could see attitudes change.

"Oh, I see it. I see the angle reflection. I get it!" shouted one student.

"I did it! I'm done. Maybe I could do a harder one?" asked one tentative girl whose confidence was just beginning to build.

"I'll try a harder one too — A CHALLENGE!" shouted one boy, proudly.

For more information on the American Indian Math Project, contact Louise Matson, director of the Division of Indian Work's Youth Leadership Development Program, at 612-722-8722, ext. 370, or e-mail her at lmatson@gmcc.org.



American Indian Math Project Coordinator Olivia Walker helps a student with a geometry lesson on angle rotation.



A new healing home

After several years of house-hunting and fund-raising, the boys in the Division of Indian Work's Healing Spirit program have moved into a new home.

The home at 3625 28th Ave. South in Minneapolis sits in a quiet neighborhood and is larger, containing one more bedroom. The previous home in the Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis had only three bedrooms. It will be sold.

In all, the new house is home to four American Indian boys, ages 13 to 17, living in long-term foster care. The youth live with adult caregivers who help the boys focus on school, their culture, and independent living skills. Many of the youth have a history of neglect, running away, poor school attendance, poor health care, and run-ins with the police.

The youth become immersed in their culture – a significant missing piece in their lives – and through that experience, begin to believe in themselves and others. They also benefit from a DIW staff member assigned exclusively as their case-worker and advocate.

The Division of Indian Work hopes to open a home for American Indian girls in 2009.



First things first – A Healing Spirit teen checks out how well stocked the new house refrigerator is.



A teen in the Healing Spirit program moves furniture into the new house.



The new Healing Spirit house in Minneapolis.

DIW receives grant to help stop the trafficking of American Indian girls in Minnesota

The Division of Indian Work (DIW) has received a 2-year, \$150,000 grant to help stop the trafficking of young Minnesota American Indian girls into sexual slavery.

“Currently we know that American Indian girls as young as 12 are being trafficked from northern Minnesota reservations into sexual exploitation. Some of the girls are being taken to Duluth and repeatedly raped by freighter crews, and some are forced into prostitution activities in the metro area,” said Noya Woodrich, DIW executive director.

The grant comes from the Minneapolis Foundation and will bring together the Division of Indian Work, the Minnesota Indian Women’s Resource Center, and the Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition to begin to address the problem with a three-pronged approach.

First, data will be gathered on the scope of the problem in Minnesota’s Indian community and used to urge federal help. Second, an education and awareness campaign will take place with the goal of legislative, public policy, and public opinion change. Finally, the groups will partner with the Minneapolis Police Department to create better intervention techniques for juvenile Native girls who have been trafficked into prostitution.

Over the long term, this project will bring to light the disproportionate rate of sexual victimization of Native women and girls, Woodrich said. “Ultimately we hope for legislation that recognizes that the vast majority of women in prostitution were trafficked and need support to rebuild their lives, especially better social service and law enforcement interventions.”



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