



For crime victims looking for support, Wiidookodaadig is a place for healing

In a city with a large, increasingly diverse population, it's very easy for American Indians to become cut off from their culture and traditional people. For victims of crime, it is even tougher to get the healing support they need.

At the Division of Indian Work, the Wiidookodaadig (Helping Each Other) Program offers a chance for those crime victims to overcome their trauma and to connect to resources for assistance. The program includes spiritual counseling, traditional ceremonies, one-on-one guidance, advocacy, referrals, trainings, support and cultural activities.

"Being disconnected from the reservation, they respect the cultural piece but are also afraid of it because they haven't lived with it," Nigel Perrote, coordinator of Wiidookodaadig, explained. "We give the people a safe place to come to and safe people to be with for healing."

Perrote explained that there are not many legitimate practitioners, so one of the hallmarks of the program is to make sure the healers that are brought in know the traditions and are trustworthy. "I'm the go-between so they are connected in the right way," Perrote said. "This is not about just protecting the clients, but the healers as well."



Michael Dahl, Anishinabe from the White Earth Nation, provides traditional counseling services to American Indians at DIW.

"When American Indians are given access to the traditional ways to heal from victimization, it is our conviction that they will be more likely to increase their cultural identity and self esteem, refrain from perpetuating violent cycles and heal their spirits from the violence that has occurred."

Excerpt the Wiidookodaadig brochure

While some clients have been to regular counselors steeped in Western traditions, those counselors may not be able to offer all that American Indians need in the healing process. "Some attending those sessions realize that there is something missing," Perrote said. "We know that a strong cultural identity is the best defense to anything."

The program, under the direction of Strengthening Family Circles director Suzanne Tibbetts Young, is the only regular provider of this service in the Twin Cities. Through Wiidookodaadig, traditional healing is very individualized and can take many forms. These include talking one-on-one, sharing a song, smudging, getting your name, a dark room ceremony and a sweat lodge ceremony. A general intake session helps determine the best course of action for the client.

Perrote explained that for Tibbetts Young, a guiding principle of the program is to never refer anyone unless she has experienced their services. "Suzanne feels very strongly about this," Perrote said. "Healers provide people with guidance, mentoring, healing and support. The program gives an extra boost to those who need it."

In the news

DIW has recently been featured in a variety of media. Below is the headline, source and an excerpt from each story. To read the complete stories go to the News & Events page at diw-mn.org.

MN Program Provides Lifeline for Foster Kids Who “Age Out”

Minnesota News Connection

The transition to adulthood can be a bumpy road for young people, and family support is often a critical lifeline. But for foster kids who have aged out of the system, the transition is even harder, as many lack the skills needed to make the jump to adulthood. A recent study from the University of Chicago suggests that extending foster care, or providing additional support until age 21, helps aid the transition, and one Minnesota program is doing exactly that. The Division of Indian Work’s Healthy Transitions program teaches a range of life skills such as resume building and job hunting, applying for college, and apartment hunting.

Embracing change, doing good

Duke University Faith and Leadership Program

Turf wars are another thing that can derail collaborations. Creating truly collaborative partnerships is one way to avoid them. For example, GMCC (Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches) has a partnership with the Division of Indian Work — Minneapolis has the third-largest concentration of urban Native Americans in the country — that is so successful that they jointly raised funds for the office building they now share.

“The Native American community and the faith community have created 20 programs to empower Minneapolis’ Indians. One of the keys to the collaboration’s success is mutual respect between the two agencies”, he (Gary Reiersen, GMCC president) said.

“We don’t interfere with each other,” he said. “If one of us wants to do something, the other has veto power over it. That way we don’t go off and create something separately that the other one doesn’t want. We fully respect each other’s financing, personnel and programming.”

Ceremonies of thanksgiving

Star Tribune

Ten bare-chested men stand around a large glowing fire pit, their breath creating furious clouds around their faces in the biting November cold.

They chant, beat a drum, pray and then strip down to their shorts. One after another, they crawl on their hands and knees into a dome-shaped sweat lodge that awaits them on a patch of snowy land in Minnetonka.

The centuries-old American Indian ceremony is their way of acknowledging Thanksgiving, expressing gratitude to a higher power for the good that’s come to them and those they love.

A boost to American Indian education

Star Tribune

“There won’t be a single kid who drops out of school and people don’t notice,” said Danielle Grant, the Minneapolis school’s director of Indian education.

The specter of boarding schools, where Indian students at times had their language and culture literally beaten out of them, still haunts families generations later. In some circles, distrust for formal education still lingers.

“In our community, education can be a really negative thing,” Grant said.

Despite the warning and challenges, Grant took the job in Minneapolis two years ago. When she wrote the grant application, she set a lofty goal for the class of 2014: Boosting that graduation rate to 80 percent.

YLDP participating in college PREP program

The Youth Leadership Development Program (YLDP) will be providing individualized mentoring services for ninth-grade American Indian students in Minneapolis Public Schools starting in January. College PREP (Personalized Resources and Education Pathways) will provide tools and the personalized support necessary for graduation in 2014 and prepare these students for success in college.

After a meeting with a mentor, an individualized action plan will be created for each student. More than 100 American Indian students are expected to participate in the program. YLDP is one of four community-based agencies chosen to work with a group of these students.

Service stretches to meet the new year

The end of the year was a very busy time at DIW:

- On Friday, Nov. 5, more than 1,300 hand-crafted bowls were distributed as a reminder of the empty bowls that need filling in our communities during the fourth annual Powderhorn Empty Bowls event. Almost 1,500 men, women and children gathered for homemade soups and fresh bread and more than 120 volunteers, many from DIW and the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, donated their time to help make the day a success. The event raised more than \$21,000 for three programs, including DIW's Horizons Unlimited Food Shelf.
- DIW's Dakotah Lodge was a busy place on Thursday, Nov. 4 and Friday Nov. 5 as more than 1,250 winter coats were handed out to American Indian children who attend Minneapolis public schools and qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. Again this year, the annual coat distribution was supported by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, with additional support from Macy's and Herberger's.
- In the days leading up to Thanksgiving, Horizons Unlimited distributed 250 donated holiday baskets to those in need. In addition, the week before Christmas, more than 1,000 toys were handed out through the Toys for Tots campaign, making the season brighter for many children and teens.



Coats and toys were selected and bowls were filled with soup lovingly prepared by volunteers as the community came together to support DIW.

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YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

~ LOUISE MATSON, DIRECTOR

Making the most of your contributions

As the need for our programs continues to grow, our employees and volunteers are motivated and dedicated to continuing our strong service to the community. And it would not be possible for DIW's programs to continue to reach those less fortunate without your moral and financial support. Thank you for your contributions.

To donate visit diw-mn.org.



By moving to more electronic forms of communication, DIW is doing its part to make the most of your contributions while reducing our carbon footprint. Please consider receiving your DIW publications by e-mail. If you would prefer this method of delivery, please contact info@gmcc.org.

One of our goals for 2011 is to build our "fan base" on Facebook. It's also a great place to receive regular updates on DIW events and programming.

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