

Association on American Indian Affairs NATIVE YOUTH SUMMER CAMPS 2023



**The Association is a 501c3 Native Nonprofit.
We do not accept federal funding.**



ASSOCIATION ON AMERICAN INDIAN AFFAIRS
Protecting Sovereignty • Preserving Culture
Educating Youth • Building Capacity
SINCE 1922

2023 Native Youth Summer Camps

The Association on American Indian Affairs is the oldest non-profit serving Native Country protecting sovereignty, preserving culture, educating youth, and building capacity. The Association was formed in 1922 to change the destructive path of federal policy from assimilation, termination, and allotment, to sovereignty, self-determination and self-sufficiency. Throughout its over 100-year history, the Association has provided national advocacy on watershed issues that support sovereignty and culture, while working at a grassroots level with Native Nations to support the implementation of programs that affect lives on the ground.

The Association started funding grants to Native Youth Summer Camps in 1963 as a powerful way for the Association to achieve its vision, mission, and goals. There is significant research that shows when Native youth are connected to their culture, they fare better mentally and emotionally than those who are not. Healthy and strong Native youth will sustain strong and diverse cultures and protect Native Nation sovereignty for years to come.

The Association provides funding for summer camps that connects Native youth with culture, and supports engaging curriculum on health, wellness, and self-care. **Between 2003 and 2023, the Association has granted \$240,000 to 180 Native Youth Summer Camps!** This year the Association provided funding for 10 camps that offered educational opportunities regarding health and wellness, cultural practices, and languages.

The Association's 2023 summer camp program supported at least **363 youth** from many Indigenous Peoples, Native Nations, and Communities including Odawa, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, Apache, Mexica, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, Tiwahe Glu Kini Pi, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, Diné, A:shiwí (Zuni), Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Red Lake Nation, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, White Earth Nation, Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Oneida Nation, Omaha, Ho Chunk, Crow Tribe, Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, Seneca, Northern Arapaho/Kickapoo, Little Earth of United Tribes community, Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota, Huslia, and Lakota from the Rosebud, Pine Ridge and Standing Rock Reservations.

This report provides information on each Native Youth Summer Camp we provided funding to. We hope you will continue to share your commitment to Native youth by donating to the Association!

Dlóó' Yázhí Day Camp



The Dlóó' Yázhí Day Camp (DYDC) completed its 9th summer of operation this year. Camp was held at the Thoreau Community Center in Thoreau, New Mexico. Participants included 41 campers representing the Diné and A:shiwí (Zuni) Nations, ranging from ages 4-14 years. DYDC was led by 10 counselors, collectively representing the Navajo, Zuni, Oglala Lakota, Apache, and Caddo Nations. There were three directors, two of whom are Diné, plus three counselors-in-training.

Daily activities included cooking, sports, art, and nature exploration and science. Campers gained cooking skills and learned about health and nutrition. Campers participated in a variety of activities including basketball, softball, volleyball, tag games, capture the flag, badminton, and more. There were also basketball and knockout tournaments for the camp families to watch. The youth explored the land, used natural materials to build "prairie dog homes," participated in a nature scavenger hunt, and developed their artistic skills through painting. Campers also tried sewing, pottery, beadwork, and recycled-material art.

DYDC hosted trips outside of camp, such as an overnight camping and fishing trip to Bluewater Lake State Park, hiking in Bluewater Creek, the canyon of the Hogbacks in Gallup, and to the lookout tower in the Cibola National Forest, as well as a trip to Gallup. Also, on the last day of camp, families and community members were invited to join the campers for a lunch cooked by the oldest campers.

Tiwahe Glu Kini Pi

“Bringing the Family Back to Life”



From June through July, Sinte Gleska University Tiwahe Glu Kini Pi “Bringing the Family Back to Life” offered the following Sunkawakan (Horse) Culture Camps to Sicangu Lakota children from the Rosebud Reservation. Three of the camps were day camps held at the SGU Horse Ranch outside of Mission on the Rosebud Reservation. The boys’ camp was an overnight camp held at the Rosebud Sioux Tribe Alcohol Program in Rosebud. Teen horse handler training camp included eight youth ages 15 to 18. After completing the training, seven youth from this camp were hired for eight weeks to assist with the remaining camps. Next came the Wicincala (younger girls) day camp with 10 participants ages 8 to 11 years, followed by Hoksila na Koskala (boys) overnight camp with 20 participants ranging from 8 to 18 years, and finally the Wikoskalaka (older girls) day camp had 10 participants ranging from 12 to 18 years.

All camps started with teachings about Mitakuye Oyasin (relationship with all of creation) by TGKP staff. Differences, diversity and inclusivity were also discussed. Youth were then introduced to their relatives, the Sunkawakan Oyate (Horse Nation.) Campers spent time connecting with their new relatives, learning about horse anatomy and safety and how to groom and take care of the horses before they learned how to ride. Every day included riding time.

For the first time, the Teen Horse Handler Training Camp offered first aid, CPR and first responder training for emergencies. Teens received certificates for the training. Nutrition, hydration and diabetes were also included in the training topics.

SONS of Mvskoke "Youth Stickball Making Camp"



The SONS of Mvskoke is a Native male mentoring organization located in Glenpool, Oklahoma. As part of their active ceremonial life, the Mvskoke people play 2 types of stickball games - one social game between men and women and another for men only. The stickball sticks are a crucial element of both ceremonial games and the camp included teaching stick making. The camp was held at the Glenpool Creek Indian Community Center and had five Muscogee (Creek) and Seminole youth in attendance. There were four adult male mentors in attendance with one Mvskoke Elder who led the instruction.

The SONS of Mvskoke Youth Ballstick Making Camp began with the Mvskoke Elder instructing everyone about the basic information associated with ceremonial customs. The participants began the stick making process by splitting the hickory logs long ways into quarters and then into eighths. From those smaller, thinner staves of wood, the youth were instructed to carve the wood into a rectangular shape. Once the stave was carved down to approximately one inch in diameter, a portion of the wood was further carved out to approximately 3/8 inch. The thinner end of the wood was then heated with steam to bend the end piece to make a 6-inch eyelet. Everyone completed this process two times to make a set of sticks. This is a lengthy and strenuous process.

Indigenous Youth Empowerment "Learning our Language and Culture"



The Indigenous Youth Empowerment Program (IYEP) hosted 30 campers ages 5 through 15 years old who participated in a number of activities focused on learning language and culture. These youth represented the Odawa, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, Apache, and Mexica Peoples.

In their two-week summer day camp, the youth learned lessons in Anishinaabemowin, were introduced to healthy cooking through a partnership with Michigan State University (MSU) and had lessons on sewing feast bundles and pouches holding sacred medicines.

The camp included two excursions: The first day's excursion included a visit to MSU's Bug House, the planetarium and museum. The Bug House taught the importance of insects to our ecosystem; MSU's planetarium provided a special showing of Anishinaabe teachings about the seasons and was created and narrated by local elders and teachers. Campers also visited the MSU Museum to explore exhibitions on climate change.

The second excursion was to a local family organic farm where youth harvested strawberries and discussed their importance to Anishinaabe culture. The day ended with a private screening of the film "Elemental." The camp ended with a community potluck and camper talent show. This was the first year that parents participated with the youth in the talent show.

Nis'to Incorporated "Bundle Carriers Camp"



The Bundle Carriers Camp was held at the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Memorial Park (the original site of the Tekawitha Orphanage and Mission School). Fifteen youth attended and were between the ages of 10 and 19. All youth are citizens of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation.

Campers spent a day at the Zani Otuwin Dakota Earthlodge village in Granite Falls, MN to learn about the goals of Makoce Ikikcupi, the Native non-profit that built the village and their mission. The camp participants spent the day with Dakota Elders to learn about the differences in the landscapes of the woods and prairies and about the plant life in each landscape.

The camp participants worked on a camp design for a 30-acre land recovery project. They shared what would be developed on the land and what kind of tallgrass prairie mapping they would use. Campers also gave a native plant medicinal use presentation for the different plants they learned about. These presentations were shared in Dakota and English to help memorize the plants in the language. The presentations included the plant, the environmental landscape, harvesting protocol, medicinal plant uses, and seed gathering.

Throughout the experience, Elders and community members knowledgeable in history, language, herbs, and Dakota culture, were included and shared their knowledge with the youth.

Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate "Youth Summer Day Camp"



The Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Summer Day Camp consisted of 52 youth ranging from 5 to 17 years old for this one-day camp. All the participants represented the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Nation and are citizens of the Nation. There were several cultural and physical activities that were held throughout each day, such as archery, talking circle, horse riding, stick ball, and lacrosse.

Sportsmanship and encouragement were evident in the youth who participated in the games. The spirit and atmosphere created by the adults, and especially coming from the youth during the camp had a positive impact on each and every person.

Meals were also provided for all the youth and other participants, as it gave them an opportunity to practice the cultural teachings about caring for each other and giving back to one's Nation and community.

Indigenous Lacrosse Alliance "Lacrosse-4-Life Camp"



The Lacrosse-4-Life Camp hosted 40 Native youth ranging in age from 10 to 16 years. The camp consisted of lacrosse instruction with morning, afternoon, and evening sessions over four days. Morning and afternoon sessions were tailored to lacrosse game play through physical activities, warm-ups, stretching techniques, and various game play including traditional lacrosse. The evening sessions were held at the Cloquet Forestry Center that mostly centered around group sessions or outdoor games like capture the flag with the coaching staff.

The youth represented the following Native Nations: Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Red Lake Nation, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, White Earth Nation, Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Oneida Nation, Omaha, Ho Chunk, Crow Tribe, Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, Seneca, Northern Arapaho/Kickapoo, and Little Earth of United Tribes community.

Huslia Tribal Council "Culture Camp"



The Huslia Culture Camp was both an overnight and day camp. The camps hosted campers of all ages during the first session of the camp, and included Native youth 14 years and older for the second camp. In total, there were more than 100 campers participating.

Activities included crafts, sewing, storytelling, and fire making skills. Veterans taught the young adults about gun safety and navigating the wooded area behind the camp. Young adults helped in the kitchen with meals and cleaning.

There were eight Elders that joined the camp during the day, where they told stories, taught the youth how to cut fish, and hang the fish to dry. The Elders also took the older campers pole fishing.

The youth of Huslia love to camp and to be out on the land. They also loved the many hours of swimming during the warmer days.

Cheyenne River Youth Project "Lakota Culture Camp"



The Cheyenne River Youth Project (CRYP) welcomed seven youth to its Lakota Summer Camp in the Waniyetu Wowapi (Winter Count) Art Park. The two-night event was the latest installment in the nonprofit organization's Lakota Camp program, which encourages Lakota youth to strengthen their connections to traditional culture and the natural environment.

The camp program incorporated a Lakota language class. The young people learned about summer ceremonies and traditional harvesting techniques, practiced Lakota words for various camping items, and worked on introductory conversations. Staff and campers also assembled a tipi and tents while learning about camping protocols and safety.

CRYP's youth advisory council talked with the campers about Lakota values they uphold and protect through their council service. The campers later harvested chokecherries in CRYP's Winyan Toka Win (Leading Lady) Garden and visited the Missouri River roughly 50 miles east of Eagle Butte. There, on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation border, they learned to fish, hike, swim, and skip rocks and play games in the river.

At the end of the program, campers learned to take down the tipi, broke down the tents, and took some time to reflect on their individual camp experiences and takeaways.

Lakota Youth Development "Wicoti Tiwahe"



Lakota Youth Development hosted over 25 youth ranging from 8 to 18 years old from across the Rosebud Reservation, but also Pine Ridge and Standing Rock Reservations. In addition to their four summer camps (Spring Harvest, Isnati Awica Lowanpi, Leadership, and Summer Harvest), all of which were four-days long, the youth stayed in tipestola "traditional lodges" on the 10-acre cultural campus. The youth developed and performed their own original script, *Learning Wolakota*, in conjunction with a Native written and produced show called *Wicoun*. Native theater has been of particular interest to our youth as work with Larissa Fast Horse (Sicangu Lakota), who is the first Native woman playwright to have a show produced on Broadway. Larissa worked with the youth to develop their skills.

The camp specifically focused on oral and multigenerational learning because this is how our Ancestors were traditionally taught. Elders were also a crucial part of the camp programming and Elders were included in nearly all activities with the youth.

The Native youth were able to build strong bonds as many of them have been attending the camp for several years. They welcome youth who are attending for the first time to join in this safe space and mentor them to learn new skills connected to culture.

Partner with us!

The Association on American Indian Affairs' 2023 Summer Camp Program Awardee stories included in this report provide a sample of the incredible impacts we can make that support Native youth. But we can do even more.

Currently, the majority of our summer camp grant program is funded through a single donor: the Ben Plucknett Charitable Trust. The grant program is also funded by the Association's unrestricted operating funds, which come from general giving.

The Association sees a demonstrated need to develop a consistent national program throughout Native Country that will address self-advocacy and build the Native youth voice. A national summer camp program will also help youth develop leadership skills that will support Native Nation sovereignty and self-determination while fulfilling the Association's vision of creating a world where diverse Native cultures are lived, protected, and respected. If you would like to participate in the development of this national opportunity, please contact the Association!

Help the Association build a National Youth Camp that is available consistently every summer to Native youth in regions across Native Country. A detailed project design is currently being developed that will provide education and tools for intergenerational healing that include:

- Self-care and self-advocacy so that Native youth are not taken advantage of.
- Hands-on tools to effectuate intergenerational healing from intergenerational and historic trauma
- Suicide prevention so that Native youth have a network of support and ways to seek help.
- Health and wellness to stay strong and brave.
- Native Nations' Histories and the U.S. government-to-government relationship.
- Develop political leadership and advocacy to support sovereignty, self-determination, and protection of cultures.

**BE A PARTNER
BE A TEACHER
BE A MENTOR**

**Partner with us to support a national network of
Native youth advocacy and self-determination!**

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