Remembering, reclaiming and reconnecting to Dakota lifeways

2014-15 BIENNIAL REPORT
Dakota Wicohan
(pronounced “wee-cho-han”; Dakota for “lifeways”)

Our vision
Dakota Wicohan’s long-term vision is to build a Dakota learning institute that prepares and empowers individuals, generation by generation, to lead with wo’Dakota (Dakota values).

Our mission
Dakota Wicohan’s mission is to revitalize Dakota as a living language, and through it, transmit Dakota lifeways to future generations.

Wo’Dakota Values

Wacan’tohnaka—generosity
Woksape—wisdom
Wo’ohitika—courage
Wo’wacintanka—patience
Wo’onsida—compassion
Waohoda—respect
Wa’ihkta—humility

Our history
Dakota Wicohan is a Native American-led nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 2002 by Dakota community members living on and near the Lower and Upper Sioux Dakota communities in southwestern Minnesota.
Message from the Board Chair and Program Director 2014-2015

Dakota Wicohan – The next generation

Han Mitakuyapi, Greetings Friends and Relatives:

It’s always difficult to highlight the accomplishments of your organization while living out the value of humility. We can’t necessarily take credit but we must give credit and gratitude to all those youth and families who joined us in the teaching and learning of our Dakota language and lifeways. Through them and the precious partnerships we were able to form, we were able to bring life to a number of dreams and goals.

A new generation of emerging Dakota artists was mentored by master artists in several traditional art forms. A new generation of aspiring Dakota language teachers and students continued to receive support and knowledge, and to share that knowledge with family and community and in the schools. A new generation of youth continued to learn the Dakota horse tradition and the leadership and responsibility that come with that connection. A new generation of Dakota youth are singing our traditional songs and playing our traditional games. A new generation of Native and non-Native teachers and students were engaged in the development of a curriculum that will deepen the knowledge and understanding of Dakota history and culture in Minnesota.

As we look back over our roles and involvement in Dakota Wicohan, whether as Board Chair and supporter in its early days of formation in 2001, or joining the Program/Finance staff four years ago, we realize that it is the next generation who will and is carrying Dakota Wicohan forward. Young women who once attended the language table as children and teens are now on our Board of Directors. Youth and young adults who once participated in our horse and language programs and summer camps are now college students or college graduates and are teachers themselves. The ripple effect is clear and far-reaching. As we grow older, we see that there is a younger generation of committed language learners, teachers, artists, horsemen and horsewomen, singers and culture bearers who will carry this forward into the future. Tokata kinhan awacami. I think about the future, and I’m encouraged.
While it may be difficult to attract a stable funding base for these efforts, the heart and soul of the work is unwavering. The funders and supporters that have joined us deserve our gratitude for helping us carry forward knowledge and lifeways that have viability and value to all of us as human beings, not only Dakota people. The relationships with the land, with each other, and with all of creation are important lessons that can be shared with everyone. These lessons are embedded in our language, in our tradition and all the cultural practices that we strive to learn, teach, and share.

We have many values as Dakota people, but the value that we’ve lived out the most over these past two years is Wo-Waditake, Fortitude. One of our Dakota elders reminded us of this. The strength of our people, the strength of mind, body, heart and spirit. The sheer will and determination to press on, to move on, to live on. Despite the challenges before us, despite the hardships or the obstacles, we press on because that is who we are. A people of strength and fortitude. WoWaditake.

If we were to characterize the message for these past couple of years, it would be a message of encouragement and gratitude for the next generation moving forward with strength and fortitude.

Pidaunyapi, We are grateful.

Gabrielle Strong, Taniya Wakan Win
Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate/Mdewakanton
Board Chair

Eileen O’Keefe, Wicanhpi Duta Win
Lower Sioux Indian Community/Mdewkanton
Program Director
Program accomplishments 2014-15

During 2014 and 2015, Dakota Wicohan served more than 300 community members in southwestern Minnesota, and brings the Dakota culture and values alive. Programs are:

Tawokaga (“making beautiful things” in Dakota) Arts program

Our Tawokaga program creates new generations of Dakota artists who keep alive traditional Dakota arts.

Three master Dakota artists mentored 13 apprentices and exhibited original works at the Granite Area Arts Council in Granite Falls, MN during summer 2015. Artists included: Dave Louis (quilling); Walter “Super” LaBatte Jr. (braintanning and beading); and Joyce LaBatte-Luckow (quilting).

A twice-monthly Beading Circle launched in fall 2015 connected a new generation of learners to their heritage as they made pouches, turtles, and baby moccasins.

My participation in Dakota Wicohan has influenced everything in my life – Ph.D. work, family life, gardening, and current position in tribal program development. The loving/inclusive nature of the language has helped to resolve identity issues. Dakota language learning brings people closer together.

--Dr. Theresa Peterson (Upper Sioux)
Dakota Wicohan co-founder
Dakota Iapi (Language)

Dakota Iapi, the Dakota language, is the root of Dakota culture and expression of Dakota values. The Dakota language is a touchstone for bringing us together as a people.

From hosting once-weekly Tiwahe (“family”) gatherings for over 50 community members to mentoring seven new Dakota language teachers, Dakota Wicohan offers the only language learning opportunities in the Lower Sioux community.

*Mni Sota Makoce: The Dakota Homelands* curriculum was created to preserve and transmit the rich historical and cultural heritage of Minnesota’s Dakota people to the next generation of leaders in our state—our youth. This project has received financial support from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, the Honor the Earth Foundation, the Collaborative Research Center for American Indian Health, and the Indian Land Tenure Foundation. This curriculum is a 10-lesson, standards-based unit that includes Dakota youth, adult, and elder voices to share Dakota perspectives and provide teachers with much-needed resources to address the Social Studies standards implemented in 2013-2014.

Teaching the Dakota language is woven throughout our youth programming, grounding young people in their Dakota identity and instilling them with pride in who they are.

*Dakota Wicohan teaches language and culture as instruction in living and how to be a good relative. Dakota Wicohan, along with all language programs, is creating a critical mass of Dakota people who demand language and culture in their communities and schools.*

--Joe Bendickson (Sisoka Duta)
University of Minnesota Dakota Language Instructor and former guest instructor for Dakota Wicohan
Youth Itancanpi ("Leadership") Programs

We mentored and supported 90 Dakota children and teens aged 10 – 21 during the past two years to become our community’s leaders. A wide range of out-of-school-time activities — from drumming and singing, and from beading to Lacrosse — help ground Dakota youth in their Native culture and to develop inner resources that will help them to become healthy adults.

Older girls (Wikska) mentored younger girls (Wiciyanza), and older boys (Koska) mentored younger boys (Hoksida) through weekly meetings and activities.

While boys meet twice-weekly for lacrosse practice and scrimmaging and once-weekly for drumming practice, girls learned about healthy eating, healthy lifestyles, and team building, and practiced lacrosse.

All the young people participated in community service activities, such as yard clean-up for tribal elders, presenting on diabetes prevention and the dangers of tobacco products, and sharing Dakota culture. Field trips/outings allowed the youth to practice and learn the Dakota language, sled in the snow, make a bird house, and learn about wildlife.

An 8-week Summer Camp served 75 8th and 9th graders during 2014 and 2015, helping them to learn practical skills, participate in cultural activities, and engage with and serve their community.

We know that we are helping to make a difference. In 2015, 100% of youth participants graduated high school and the majority has continued their education in college. Our pre- and post-program surveys created by a professional evaluator confirmed participating youths’ improved sense of belonging (to community), Wicozani (well-being), and decisionmaking skills.

Sunktanka Wicayuhapi (They Care for Horses) Program

Girls have a special place in Dakota culture. Fostering a connection to horses and the Dakota horse culture infuses Dakota girls with teachings about responsibility and ancestral connections.

During 2014-15, 12 girls aged 12-21 learned to care for and ride horses at Wasake Ranch. They participated at three levels (Introduction to Horsemanship, Beginning Apprentice, and Horse Woman), riding weekly in during Fall, Spring, and Summer, with the young women mentoring those younger.

7 of the girls (and 3 boys) participated in the Dakota 38+2 Ride in December 2014 and 2015, a major multi-state, multi-community event commemorating the 38 Dakota warriors who were hanged on December 26, 1862 in Minnesota in the largest one-day execution in American history. Joining with 500 other riders and participants for prayers, offerings and fellowship Dakota Wicohan youth take a spiritual journey as well as a practical one.
Community outreach and education

Dakota Wicohan serves as a cultural and activity hub for Native American and non-Native community members.

2014 and 2015 events sharing music, dance, art, health education, and fellowship reached 500 community members. Events included:

- The fall Wopida celebration;
- Family Fun Days in fall and summer;
- Presentations by Master Dakota cultural experts including making a traditional Dakota and Ojibwe lacrosse stick, learning about medicines and foods from indigenous plants, constructing a tipi, and horse regalia; and
- Presentations and discussions of Dakota Wicohan’s documentary on the story of the Dakota language in Minnesota, Dakota Iapi Teuhnhindapi: We Cherish the Dakota Language.

We also brought the wisdom of Dakota girls to the November 2015 White House Listening Tour in the State of Minnesota hosted by the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota. Here, our youth were able to share their voices on the education gap American Indian girls face and possible solutions. They participated on a youth panel to an audience composed of school, government, and grant officials. The panel was very eager to hear what the young girls had to say. It was an amazing time for the youth to voice themselves and for others to see the power they hold.

We are working with people where they’re coming from, their motivations and aspirations, growing leadership from within the community. We have been and remain grassroots.

-- Gabrielle Strong, Taniya Wakan Win
Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate/Mdewakanton
Dakota Wicohan Board Chair
Thank you to our 2014-15 supporters!

Dakota Wicohan extends its heartfelt thanks to the funders and donors listed below who share our values and provide the resources to fulfill our mission.

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- Bernick Family Foundation
- Blandin Foundation
- First Nations Development Institute
- Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches
- Grotto Foundation
- Headwaters Foundation
- Indian Land Tenure Foundation
- Irwin Andrew Porter Foundation
- Lower Sioux Indian Community
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Minnesota Department of Public Safety
- Minnesota Historical Society
- Minnesota Horse Council
- Minnesota Indian Affairs Council
- Minnesota State Arts Board
- N7 Fund
- Otto Bremer Trust
- Redwood Area United Way
- Seventh Generation Fund
- Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community
- Shavlik Family Foundation
- Southwest Initiative Foundation
- Southwest Minnesota Arts Council
- Synod of Lakes and Prairies
- The McKnight Foundation
- The Notah Begay III Foundation
- University of Minnesota Morris
- University of Minnesota, Center for American Indian and Minority Health
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/ Administration for Native Americans
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- Women’s Foundation of Minnesota
- Youthprise
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Kathryn McKee
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Lower Sioux Community

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Lower Sioux Community

**Laverne Goodthunder**
Youth Worker
Lower Sioux Community

**Dylan Jubera**
Office Assistant
Lower Sioux Community

**Doris Stands**
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Lower Sioux Community

**Ryan Dixon**
Youth Worker
Pine Ridge
# Dakota Wicohan
## Financial Report - Select Totals

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