

## **2017 PINE RIDGE/LAKOTA YOUTHSTAY TEAM ANNUAL REPORT**

2017 was a watershed year for the Pine Ridge team. Sanctuary continued with our Pine Ridge ministry through annual volunteering on the reservation and greatly expanded the ministry with the inaugural year of the Lakota YouthStay program.

A small group of five volunteers went out to Pine Ridge in July 2017 and once again connected with ReMember to work on various building projects throughout the reservation. The strong connection between ReMember and Sanctuary has continued due to the ongoing commitment of Sanctuary to organize volunteers to go to Pine Ridge each summer. ReMember is a true supporter of the YouthStay program and generously shared their resources and time in support of the YouthStay program throughout 2017. ReMember lent the YouthStay team their van and meeting space for pre-trip youth get-togethers and advisory meetings and provided transportation to/from the airport for the LYS youth. We are very grateful and appreciative of ReMember's support.

The Lakota YouthStay application process started in January 2017 and fifteen Lakota youth applied for the program. Ten youth were selected by the advisor team and a series of pre-trip get-togethers were organized for the 2017 YouthStay group. This proved to be a key factor in establishing trust between the Lakota youth/families and the LYS team. In late July 2017, seven girls and three boys arrived in Medford for a week of cultural exchange, building friendships and exploration/discovery of the world around them through engagement in shared activities of interest. The youth were hosted by eight families from Medford, Arlington and Malden. The youth and many of the host families engaged in a variety of activities including a whale watch, boat trip on the Merrimack, visits to the beach, aquarium, Fenway, MFA, Drumlin Farm, and several potluck dinners. The 8 day program was a wonderful success thanks to involvement and support of so many volunteers, donors, community members, Sanctuary members/staff and city officials. The City of Medford offered the program a van and driver and passes to Wright's Pond. Grace Episcopal Church sponsored a community dinner. Arts Alive provided funding for new cameras and a photography exhibit. The Wampanoag tribe hosted the LYS group and host families for a youth gathering on Cape Cod. Sanctuary's own Susan Fuller, Julie Roberts and Joe Luongo donated their time and talents for photography and art workshops. The inaugural year of

LYS was truly a community event and opened many paths for further collaboration in the ever-widening Sanctuary/Lakota YouthStay community.

Several post-trip feedback sessions were held in August/September with the Lakota youth and their families and the host families. It was during these sessions that the positive impact of the LYS program was felt. Feedback from the youth included statements such as:

- I am more confident in myself
- I learned I can do new things on my own
- I am stronger than I thought because I can be away from my family and be ok
- I am interested in seeing new places
- I can be off the reservation and have fun
- I can enjoy meeting new people who are different than me
- I am more interested in school and going to college
- I am more social and willing to share my thoughts/feelings

Feedback from Lakota youth families included statements such as:

- The program was well organized with good communication
- My child/grandchild is more confident in themselves
- My child/grandchild is happy and excited about life
- My child/grandchild is meeting new people and making new friends
- My child/grandchild is willing to try new activities/foods, etc.
- My child/grandchild expresses an interest in college
- Our family is connected now with families in Boston
- It is important for my child/grandchild to see what life is like off the reservation and the YouthStay program gave them this opportunity
- The entire experience was positive for my child/grandchild and our family

Feedback from host families included:

- The pre-trip orientation meeting with the Lakota advisor was very helpful in preparing us to host
- Pre-trip communication was helpful especially connecting with the families and reading the youth personal statements
- The YouthStay week was well planned and included a rich variety of interesting activities including the day spent with the Wampanoag tribe and youth group

- The YouthStay team was responsive and thorough
- Loved learning about native life and culture
- Strong bonds developed between the host families many of whom did not know each other beforehand

The program is very fortunate to have several committed advisors on the reservation and in our local community. Christy Webber, Shannon Freed, Susan Fairchild, Jeff Buxbaum and Rev. Wendy are a few of the people that have dedicated countless hours of time and energy to LYS. Christy Webber, in particular, was instrumental in the success of the program. Christy organized the pre and post-trip get-togethers, participated in the host family orientation meeting in early June 2017, traveled to/from Boston with the youth, co-lead the YouthStay week and organized a successful basketball tournament fundraiser on the reservation. The program would not be where it is today without the commitment of Christy as well as the rest of the LYS advisors and staff to the youth and their strong belief that the mission of LYS can bring hope, inspiration and change lives.

Three articles were published about the program in 2017 – two in the Medford Transcript and one in the UCC national publication. Lakota YouthStay participated in several community events including West Medford Open Studios and the Mystic River Celebration. This exposure resulted in three new families signing up to host a youth for 2018. This is in addition to the majority of 2017 host families signing up to host again in 2018.

In December 2017, Joy and Bruce traveled to South Dakota to participate in the Lakota Nation Invitational. LNI is well attended youth event in Rapid City featuring an art exhibit, archery, wrestling, Lakota hand games and a very popular basketball tournament. LYS had an informational table at the event and was able to connect with many Lakota youth and families. In addition, they were able to visit with most the 2017 youth who were in attendance at LNI.

Several fundraisers were held for the program including the ever-popular annual Cookie Walk and a Lakota quilt raffle. Three grant proposals were submitted in 2017 and LYS was approved for two grants from Riverside Church Densford Fund and UCC Neighbors in Need. LYS continued to receive many individual donations

throughout the year. A donation was made in 2017 to ReMember to thank them and show support for their good work on Pine Ridge.

Joy and Bruce were invited to speak about Pine Ridge and LYS at several area churches in 2017. Not only is this generating an awareness of the challenges on Pine Ridge but the presentation also increases awareness of Sanctuary's work on Pine Ridge and the YouthStay program.

Sanctuary continues to be committed to the people of Pine Ridge through ongoing work through ReMember and with our new YouthStay program. These ministries are allowing connections to be made both on Pine Ridge and in our own local community. For this, we are humbled and grateful for the opportunity to learn, to grow, to do good and spread love and hope in the world.