

## 2018 Lakota YouthStay Executive Summary

In 2017, LYS went from an idea in conversation to a fleshed out program as over 2 years of planning and brainstorming became a reality. Ten Lakota young people were selected from a pool of 15 applicants, were oriented to the program and to each other while still on the reservation, and in July, the 10 nervous but excited young people came to Medford where they stayed with eight host families and engaged in daily excursions and activities of interest to them. Eight days later, they were returned home, safe, sound and happy, under the watchful of eyes of chaperone and LYS advisor, Christy Webber.

The 2017 Lakota YouthStay program was a complete and wondrous success. Given all of the possibilities for something to go astray when working with two diverse groups over a thousand miles and a world of opportunities apart, everything went extremely well. There were no major setbacks in 2017. Some YouthStay supporters on the reservation had “warned” us to be realistic and expect setbacks—for youth or their families to back out at the last minute or not show up for the departure day pick up or to show up unprepared. None of these scenarios occurred. Several of the youth required significant mentoring during the application process and pre-trip period due to insufficient adult oversight within their families. One of the reasons that the program ran so smoothly is the thorough pre-trip communication and preparation that was undertaken. There were 4 pre-trip get-togethers for the youth and their families on the reservation and countless email/phone conversations which allowed the young people to get to know each other and for them and their families to get to know the LYS director and advisors. These pre-trip activities on the reservation and consistent communication allowed a sense of trust, comfort and excitement to develop between all parties before the departure date. This need reinforces the importance of ongoing communication and support, both remotely and on-site, from the director and LYS advisors/volunteers.

One “hiccup” we did experience was an unexpected situation that arose 2 weeks before the departure date. At one of the pre-trip get-togethers, an advisor noticed that 1 or 2 of the youth had head lice. This necessitated forming a culturally sensitive plan quickly to address the situation before departure day. It meant placing calls to the native and host families explaining the situation. Given the possibility of misunderstanding and mistrust with the native families and concern with the host families, the situation had to be addressed with great sensitivity. In the end, all the families agreed to the plan resulting in all of the youth ready to come to Boston on the appointed day with no evidence of lice.

The post-trip sessions for youth and their families as well as host families were crucial to obtaining feedback on the program as well as ideas/suggestions for improvement and change for the next year. Given the importance of the pre-trip prep and post-trip sessions, the various expenses for them has been included in the 2018 budget to ensure these gatherings are well organized and welcoming.

Due to the challenging conditions on the reservation, it was difficult to find and keep Lakota LYS volunteer advisors this past year. Several would-be advisors had to back away from this role due to personal challenges and circumstances: loss of employment or transportation, lack of internet access,

inability to cover travel expenses, health issues or shifting family priorities. This made it clear that finding consistently available, dependable advisors would be more of a challenge than anticipated. We also realized that we would need to assist our reservation-based colleagues with some of the financial burdens that their LYS volunteerism would put on them by providing gas cards or other “incentives” to offset real costs to them. For example, the use of their cell phones to speak with us and to interested young people often led them to run out of “minutes” on their phone before the month was out. This led to days, sometimes weeks, where communication with on-reservation advisors was limited or non-existent. Driving to a community meeting to promote the program or a pre/post trip get-together or to help a young person with their LYS application on a different part of the reservation might push an advisor over their gas budget for the month and present a significant financial burden for them. Likewise, costs for food for reservation get-togethers, refreshments and other costs (security and referees) for fundraisers like the October 2017 LYS basketball tournament held on the reservation were higher than anticipated and not known last winter when last year’s budget was drawn up. Despite the fact that the poverty on Pine Ridge is extreme, the cost of goods such as food, gas, etc. is higher than in most parts of the country. These expenses led to our request for some additional funding mid-year in 2017. The 2018 budget will be sufficient to cover these various expenses and to assist our crucial reservation advisors, advocates and volunteers with YouthStay responsibilities while minimizing their financial burden.

Among the many lessons learned from year one of the LYS program is the need for a strong coordinator on the reservation—the “face” of LYS on Pine Ridge. We have created a description of this position and believe that Christy Webber is the best person to carry out these important responsibilities. The proposed 2018 budget includes a stipend for this position as well as costs to provide infrastructure (a printer/fax/copier/ink, reliable internet access across the reservation, and cell service) for the coordinator. Another important message we have received from LYS families and supporters on Pine Ridge is a need for more frequent visits by the YouthStay staff in Medford to the reservation. With this in mind, Joy and Bruce made an additional trip to SD in December 2017 to participate in the Lakota Nation Invitational, an important and well attended youth event. Previous year’s budgets lacked realistic costs for food, lodging and transportation for the LYS director and advisor(s) for these types of trips. The 2018 budget proposal includes the cost for two additional trips to South Dakota in addition to the customary trip in the summer. One of these trips will be to participate in an on-reservation fundraiser organized and planned by the LYS Coordinator, Christy Webber, in the coming calendar year. These adjustments to the budget represent both a more realistic set of costs for the program as well as an enhancement of the LYS “infrastructure” on the Pine Ridge which should make the program more sustainable for years to come.

Additional funds were allocated in the 2018 proposed budget to enhance the program activities during the YouthStay week. Although we were very fortunate in 2017 to receive donated activities (Merrimack boat ride), free passes (Aquarium, MFA) and sponsorships (whale watch), there is no guarantee that this will be forthcoming in 2018. Additional funds were also included in the budget for

passes for some activities for host families/youth as a way of showing gratitude for their service as chaperones for those activities.

On the revenue side, LYS was fortunate to be awarded 3 grants in 2017-18: the Densford grant for \$10k; the Arts Alive grant for \$1497 and the Neighbors in Need grant for \$10k. This has provided the program with a significant “step up” as we move ahead with the 2018 program. The LYS team, with the help of Sanctuary and Pine Ridge volunteers and staff, was able to fundraise significantly more than the \$3500 budgeted for 2017. The combination of grant monies and successful fundraising has allowed the program to start 2018 with a solid financial foundation with only \$5k required to meet anticipated expenses in 2018. With the proposed addition of a Sanctuary fundraiser/grant writer/administrator, the Leadership Circle voted to significantly increase the LYS fundraising goal for 2018 to \$25k. It is proposed that the new fundraiser/grant writer/marketing manager will dedicate 20 – 25% of their time and effort to LYS and, with the full support of the Sanctuary community, raise the funds required to meet the goal of \$25k. This will provide the \$5k needed for this year and allow for \$20k to be carried over to the 2019 LYS program.

The LYS team looks forward to the continued growth and success of the program in 2018. The program has been, thus far, an inspiration and source of hope for the Lakota youth and their families on Pine Ridge and an educational and bonding experience for the City of Medford, Sanctuary community and host families. We look forward to a promising 2018!