An In-Depth Look at Your Support in South Dakota

A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

This special issue shows some of the wonderful ways your gift is transforming students, teachers and communities in South Dakota. It’s happening through a local Courage to Teach program called the WoLakota Project — a partnership with the South Dakota Department of Education, Technology & Innovation in Education (TIE), and South Dakota Elders.

You’ll see how your gift and the WoLakota Project are combining to build trust and hope—and lay the groundwork for long-lasting change in people’s lives.

In a nutshell, the situation in high-needs schools on reservations and surrounding communities in South Dakota was dire:

- Staggering numbers of teachers were dropping out
- Students suffered without adult support
- People struggled to connect across historical cultural divides

But you’ve helped create safe space where teachers reconnect to themselves, to each other and to cultural wisdom. They pass these gifts on to their students, too.

Courageous schools are vital to improving South Dakota’s communities. Although the transformations reach far and wide, inside this issue are three stories of how you’re making a difference:

Your gift helped teachers stay committed. In the schools you supported, 100% of Teachers didn’t quit!

Your gift supported facilitators’ passion for combining Courage to Teach with Native American wisdom to help teachers respond to culture respectfully.

You gave cheerleaders an inspired teacher who encouraged them to create a community of authentic kindness.

If you’re curious how your gift to Courage & Renewal touches so many different lives, read the stories inside!

You put hope in the hearts of many people!

With gratitude,

Terry Chadsey, Executive Director
Liviva’s transformation—from a teacher on the verge of quitting to a teacher who’s changing students’ lives forever—is just one of the ways your support reaches many different people. Thank you!

“I was doing a terrible job. It wasn’t good for my kids or for me,” said high school teacher Olivia Olson. “My kids deserve amazing teachers.”

Olivia was going to quit. It was her first semester teaching on the Standing Rock reservation and the heartbreaking realities all around overwhelmed her. It’s an all-too-common scenario for new teachers in South Dakota.

Thanks to you, Olivia loves teaching again because now she understands the importance of self-care. And she’s giving that gift to her students.

Olivia was one of the teachers in the 2013-2014 WoLakota Courage to Teach retreat series. The experience changed her life and kept her from quitting.

“I take time for myself now, which I wouldn’t have done before Courage to Teach,” she said. “I take care of myself so I can do right by my students.”

Olivia’s freshmen students desperately need a teacher who knows how to model self-care and commitment. On these reservations you’re most likely to see students around the age of 16 dropping out or worse, committing suicide. It’s devastating for the community.

Courage to Teach taught Olivia to create the safe space for students to share their feelings, embrace their cultural identities and practice reflective self-care.

“I tell my kids, ‘There are ways to take care of yourself so you don’t end up dropped out or dead. You are at stake and so is your future.’”

Because Olivia takes time to renew herself, she’s able to support her students emotionally and academically. Her kids are beginning to feel optimistic about their futures. And in just one year, their reading skills jumped three grade levels.

When those astounding test scores came out, other teachers said to Olivia, “You must be doing something right. What is it?”

“I’m loving them unconditionally,” Olivia replied.

Thank you for giving Olivia the chance to become a better teacher so that her kids can have a better education and a better life!

Facilitators Help Teachers & Tribal

Your support has led to so many amazing outcomes in the WoLakota Project! You enabled Sharla and Scott to facilitate the programs that helped teachers value cultural difference. Now, teachers have more hope. Distressed by cultural difference and the anguish in the surrounding community, new teachers on or near Native American reservations were dropping out after their first year. Many schools had 100% turnover of new teachers.
People in struggling communities in South Dakota really need encouragement. Many of them are wrestling with alcoholism, drug abuse, poverty and unemployment. But change is possible, and it has already begun with a group of schoolgirls.

An unlikely friendship between cheerleaders from two culturally different communities brought encouragement to both their hometowns.

All of this started when LeeVi Story attended the WoLakota Courage to Teach. (See her photo on page 1.) LeeVi experienced the transformational power of connecting to true self and to others. She passed that gift on to the cheerleaders she coaches.

“I want my girls to believe in themselves and see that they are part of change. And I wanted them to see that there are others motivated by the same dream,” said LeeVi.

During their weekly sharing circles, LeeVi’s cheerleaders focused on their goal: to be the kindest, most helpful girls in school.

At the Courage to Teach retreat, LeeVi met Ira Taken Alive and found out he was starting a cheer team at McLaughlin on the Standing Rock reservation. She knew just what he was facing!

When LeeVi told her cheerleaders about the girls at McLaughlin forming a cheer team too, they decided not to be rivals, but to offer support and friendship.

The girls sent the other cheerleaders a school spirit care package with letters of encouragement. The acts of kindness grew, with both teams attending each others’ games and celebrating each others’ successes. At the end of the season, the girls from Standing Rock won a state cheerleading award, and LeeVi’s girls felt like they’d won too.

“Be the change you want to see. My girls refer to that quote a lot!”

Elders Connect Across Cultures

Thanks to your gift, the WoLakota Project has reversed this trend by helping teachers be more culturally responsive and remain dedicated to their schools.

“Of the fifty teachers we’ve supported, all remained in their schools for another year,” said Scott Simpson and Sharla Steever, the Courage & Renewal facilitators who designed and led the WoLakota Courage to Teach program.
Facilitators Help Teachers & Tribal Elders Connect Across Cultures

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“Circles of Trust helped us create a place where we can move toward deeper understanding of each other, of ourselves, and of culture,” said Scott.

Also, Scott and Sharla videotaped interviews with tribal elders to use as ‘third thing’ learning tools. The elders trusted the facilitators to convey their wisdom in a respectful, authentic way. That’s vital in light of a long history of untrustworthy relationships with non-native people.

Teachers now have a deeper capacity to welcome different cultural ideas and identities in the classroom, and they’re feeling hopeful about their jobs.

Without your support for Courage & Renewal, this unbelievable change wouldn’t have been possible.

Thank you for creating amazing change in South Dakota schools, helping teachers be culturally responsive and stay committed.

Cheerleaders Lead with Kindness

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“Students showing thoughtfulness, kindness, and empathy to another group is exactly what we should see youth doing in a world of competition,” said LeeVi. “It was the ultimate awesome.”

“If we want to make the world a positive place, we have to be positive. It starts with us,” LeeVi said. “Be the change you want to see. My girls refer to that quote a lot!”

Thanks to you, LeeVi shared Courage practices with her girls that helped them lift up their school—and share that encouragement with another community.

Reflection from Parker J. Palmer: Teaching With An Open Heart

“Teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require.” — from The Courage to Teach

How do you keep your heart open—to your inner life and your community?

I want more successes like WoLakota!

Yes! I’d like to keep supporting programs like the WoLakota Project and give more Courage & Renewal to people around the world.

Please accept my gift of:

☐ $ 50  ☐ $ 100  ☐ $ 250
☐ $______________ to help people thrive.

All gifts to the Center for Courage & Renewal are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. 1402 Third Avenue, Suite 925 Seattle, WA 98101

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