



2025 Annual Impact Report

Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota | "Healing begins where it has always begun — in returning to who the Creator made us to be."

About Oceti Wakan

Oceti Wakan (Sacred Fireplace) was founded in 1989 by two visionary Lakota medicine men — Petaga Yuha Mani (Pete Catches) and Zintkala Oyate (Peter Catches) — 37th and 38th-generation spiritual leaders who spent decades reviving sacred ceremonies and restoring what colonization had taken from their people. The grandfather of one of our founders survived the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890. What followed was generations of forced Indian Education — a cultural genocide designed to "kill the Indian but save the man" — whose wounds are still felt in every household on Pine Ridge today.

For over 35 years, Oceti Wakan has served Pine Ridge Reservation and the surrounding Lakota and Dakota communities across South Dakota. We began by developing books and recordings to preserve Lakota culture and language, integrating these into schools and communities. Over time, our work grew into a comprehensive K–12 curriculum, adult healing and life skills programs, teacher training, parent workshops, and community healing initiatives — now reaching 4,500+ students across 40+ schools on nine reservations statewide.

Our founders understood that the path to healing begins with returning to who the Creator made us to be as Lakota people. That was their life's mission, and we carry it forward today — guided by prayer, spiritual principle, and the foundational teaching of Mitakuye Oyasin: All My Relations.

2025 By the Numbers

4,500+

Students served daily through our K-12 curriculum

40+

Schools implementing our Life Skills programs

9

Reservations across South Dakota

1,000+

Educators trained through conferences and workshops

80-90%

Program completion rate in jail and treatment programs

2nd

Annual Teachers' Conference held in 2025

85

Educators attended our 2025 Teachers' Conference

200+

Children served through our annual holiday program

2025 Milestone: On September 30, 2025, Oceti Wakan completed its comprehensive K–12 Life Skills curriculum — a decade in the making. "Life Skills for the Young Lakota/Dakota" and "Wolakota/Wodakota Life Skills for Teens" are now fully complete, representing one of the most comprehensive culturally grounded K–12 healing curricula ever developed for Indigenous students.

Our Programs

K-12 Life Skills Curriculum

Our flagship programs — Life Skills for the Young Lakota/Dakota (K-8) and Wolakota/Wodakota Life Skills for Teens (High School) — are grounded in the teachings of the Lakota Medicine Wheel. Each curriculum nurtures the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental dimensions of every student, creating balanced, resilient individuals connected to their heritage. Now reaching 4,500+ students across 40+ schools on nine reservations statewide.

Parent Engagement Workshops

One-Day Intensive Workshops bring parents and caregivers into the healing circle, teaching them about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), epigenetics, and how to move out of stress and into creation. Parents receive hands-on experience with the same tools their children learn in school, followed by monthly community sessions throughout the school year.

Teacher Training & Professional Development

Our 2nd Annual Teachers' Conference brought educators and behavioral health professionals together from across nine reservations. In 2025, 85 teachers attended, reporting an average 4.5 out of 5 satisfaction rating, with 79% recommending the conference to colleagues. Keynote addresses are filmed and made available on our website, YouTube, and Facebook.

Jail & Treatment Programming

Our *Guide to Transformation Using Lakota Values* curriculum serves inmates at the OST jail and community members at the Green Tipi Behavioral Health facility. With program completion rates of 80-90%, participants demonstrate measurable decreases in stress levels and increases in wellness on pre/post surveys. Short-term prisoners may continue coursework upon release.

What Our Students Are Telling Us

467 students across nine reservations told us how they are doing — and what they shared gives us hope. Students are reporting stronger connections to their cultural identity, growing belief in their own resilience, and deeper relationships with peers and trusted adults. They are practicing forgiveness, resolving conflicts, and beginning to see themselves as people with gifts and purpose. We are actively working toward full evidence-based validation — a process that takes time and comes with its own challenges — and what we are witnessing today meets the recognized standard of a Promising Practice: measurable results pointing toward deep and lasting transformation.

Voices From the Community

"The incoming freshman class — hands down, the best we've ever received."

— Little Wound High School Teachers, after those middle school students received Life Skills curriculum for three years daily

"This curriculum makes too much of a difference in children's behavior."

— Teacher at Tikini School, who refused to pause the curriculum during a school crisis

"Our students are coming in knowing how to regulate, how to breathe, how to be present."

— Educator, Pine Ridge Reservation

Our Foundation

The foundation of Oceti Wakan is inseparable from the spiritual life of the Lakota people. Long before this organization existed, the framework for everything we do was already here — carried forward through 38 generations of medicine keepers, encoded in ceremony, and lived in the daily practice of a people who understood that all life is sacred and interconnected.

Our work is rooted in the teachings brought to the Lakota people by Pte San Win (Buffalo Calf Woman), whose gifts of the Sacred Pipe and the Seven Sacred Rites established the values and virtues that have guided Lakota life for generations: compassion, humility, generosity, wisdom, respect, fidelity, gratitude, and hope. These are not historical artifacts — they are living instructions for how to walk in right relationship with oneself, with others, and with creation.

At the heart of these teachings is Mitakuye Oyasin — "All My Relations" — a prayer and a worldview that recognizes the unbreakable web of relationship connecting every living being. It is this understanding that shapes how we design our programs, how we enter communities, and how we measure success. Healing is never individual. When one person heals, the ripple moves outward through family, through community, through generations yet to come.

This is why we serve across the full arc of community life. This is why we begin and end in gratitude. And this is why, after more than 35 years, we have never lost faith in our people's capacity to heal.

Humility	We arrive with questions, not answers — listening first, always searching for ways to be of service.
Generosity	Our programs are bountiful and offered to every community we serve.
Respect	Every curriculum we have developed was created with our community, not for it.
Fidelity	We show up year after year, decade after decade — rooted here, and that rootedness is itself a form of healing.
Mitakuye Oyasin	We serve across the full spectrum of community life — children, parents, teachers, inmates, and elders — because healing one, heals all.
Gratitude	We begin and end every gathering in thanksgiving — grateful for the ancestors who carried this knowledge forward and for every person who walks this healing path with us.
Hope	We believe deeply in the capacity of our people to heal. Every child who walks into a classroom, every parent who attends a workshop, every relative who completes a program is living proof that transformation is possible.

A note on Hope: When Peter Catches proposed adding Hope to the Life Skills curriculum, Cindy questioned whether it was truly part of the traditional Lakota values. Peter's answer was simple and certain — Hope must be included for the children, because without it, they could never achieve all that they were created to achieve. It has been part of our curriculum ever since.

Looking Ahead: 2026 and Beyond

Our 2026–2030 strategic vision follows two interconnected paths:

Path One | Building Healing Capacity

Beyond expanding our reach to 75+ schools statewide, we are committed to deepening the quality and sustainability of every school we serve. We are working to establish the Life Skills curriculum as a formally recognized evidence-based program — documenting outcomes and ensuring the transformative results our teachers and students experience are captured and validated. Looking to the future, we want to identify and train local curriculum mentors in each participating school — trusted community members who provide ongoing support long after initial training ends. And we are investing in parent engagement like never before, because when a child brings these teachings home and finds their parent speaking the same language of healing, something profound shifts in that household. Our goal is not simply more schools — it is deeper roots in every community we touch, so that the Life Skills curriculum becomes not a program that visits, but a living practice that stays.

Path Two | Oceti Wakan Healing Center

The Oceti Wakan Healing Center will be more than a building — it will be a living community. Our vision includes a residential program for individuals transitioning from addiction treatment or incarceration, offering a structured, nurturing environment where healing happens on every level. Residents will engage in daily support groups, parenting and financial life skills classes, Lakota language instruction, and traditional cultural practices. Alongside this inner work, they will learn practical vocational skills — healthy cooking, gardening, food production, and sustainable living — building the foundation for lives of purpose, dignity, and self-sufficiency. This is the sacred space our founders envisioned: where the healing circle completes, and transformation becomes a way of life.

The wounds caused by historical trauma do not heal themselves. But communities do — if they have the right tools, relationships, and the freedom to heal on their own terms. Within one generation, if we work together, we can transform our community. Not through outside intervention, but through restoring what has always been ours — cultural wisdom, spiritual grounding, and the unbreakable truth of Mitakuye Oyasin.

We are not fixing our community. We are walking alongside it — toward wholeness.