
BLACKFEET TRIBAL BUSINESS COUNCIL



Project Title:	Improving the Well-Being of Children – Healthy Marriage Initiative
Award Amount:	\$982,871
Type of Grant:	SEDS - Strengthening Families
Project Period:	Sept. 2006 – Sept. 2011
Grantee Type:	Tribe

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 4 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 1 Native American consultant hired
- 100 elders involved
- 500 youth involved
- \$31,970 in resources leveraged
- 50 individuals trained
- 21 partnerships formed

BACKGROUND

The Blackfeet Nation, with nearly 16,000 members, has roughly 8,500 tribal residents within reservation boundaries. On the reservation, the average annual income is under \$6,000, and the unemployment rate is over 70 percent. In this challenging climate, there are myriad social problems, including low high school graduation rates (only 35 percent) and high rates of substance abuse, addiction, and domestic violence.

To address the tribe's economic and social problems, the Blackfeet Nation's governing body, the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, uses the services of the Blackfeet Manpower Program, a "one-stop" center promoting employability through education, training,

advocacy, case management, and support services. Though Blackfeet Manpower's primary objectives are to improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, and enhance the competitiveness of the Blackfeet economy, Manpower staff members also work to address issues affecting the health, well-being, and quality of life of tribal members, including 2,217 welfare recipients enrolled in Manpower's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. In a 2006 survey on relationship skills, 30 percent of tribal TANF recipients reported that drugs and alcohol hindered their relationships, 27 percent expressed a need to improve communication skills, and 17 percent reported domestic violence.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The project's purpose was to increase the percentage of married couples in healthy marriages, equip unmarried couples with the skills to form and sustain healthy marriages, provide native youth and young adults with knowledge to make informed decisions about healthy relationships, reduce domestic violence, enhance communication within relationships, and provide a more positive family structure for the well-being and

development of Blackfeet children. In the first year of the project, the main objective was to select and adapt a healthy marriage curriculum to the cultural needs of the Blackfeet community and to train staff members in the curriculum. To accomplish this, the project team selected the Love's Cradle Healthy Marriage curriculum, conducted four community focus groups to identify community relationship themes, modified the curriculum, and ensured that four staff members received training.

In year two, the project team focused on providing training to community members. Recruiting participants from the TANF program, project trainers provided 21 two-hour sessions of Love's Cradle healthy relationship training to 150 couples. Each TANF couple completing the training received continuing work investment hours from Blackfeet TANF and ongoing information about job opportunities from Manpower's one-stop center. All trainees completed pre- and post-tests at each session, enabling trainers to assess learning.

In years three and four, project staff provided a 14-session Love's Cradle program for 360 individuals treated in the tribe's chemical dependency program, facilitated healthy relationship classes for 101 students at reservation schools and over 300 youth at summer camps, co-hosted a "Male Influence in My Life" poster contest for 120 children, and provided training of trainers (ToT) training for 25 married couples, nine of which would later serve the program as community trainers. Project staff used talking circles, cultural activities, games, and peer-to-peer teaching methods to make lessons accessible and interesting for participants. New community trainers (from the ToT program) were utilized in some of the trainings, and they focused on wide-ranging issues, including the importance of sustaining healthy relationships for the well-being of children. Project staff also

conducted an ongoing public outreach campaign, setting up booths at community events, festivals, and gatherings, engaging in discussion with clergy and congregations of various religious denominations, and promoting a tribally-sanctioned Blackfeet Reservation Marriage Initiative, with events and activities occurring on Valentine's Day in years three, four, and five.

In year five, turnover of key staff members resulted in fewer trainings being conducted. New project team members, however, continued outreach activities and worked steadfastly to ensure that the program would continue, creating a referral process for at-risk couples and bringing together tribal programs (including the tribe's housing department, drug and alcohol treatment center, Blackfeet Community College, and the Community Management Team) to allow community healthy marriage instruction and project services to continue.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

According to project staff, hundreds of community members, including couples, tribal youth, church congregations, drug and alcohol rehabilitation clients, and others benefitted from the project. After analyzing hundreds of pre- and post-tests completed by trainees, the project team learned that there had been a statistically significant reduction among project participants in domestic violence, psychological aggression, and sexual coercion; and an increase in negotiation behaviors and other positive habits. Consultant Billy Jo Kipp commented on how newly learned conflict resolution and communication skills have helped participants: "There is less yelling in the homes of our participants, which undoubtedly improves the sense of security of children in those families. The couples who stay together will benefit the welfare of the children and enhance our survival as Blackfeet people."

NKWUSM



Project Title:	Salish Language Academic Curriculum Development
Award Amount:	\$720,640
Type of Grant:	Language
Project Period:	Sept. 2008 – Sept. 2011
Grantee Type:	Native Nonprofit

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 7 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 6 elders involved
- 27 youth involved
- \$132,885 in resources leveraged
- 58 individuals trained
- 14 partnerships formed
- 27 youth increased their ability to speak a native language
- 21 adults increased their ability to speak a native language

BACKGROUND

In 2002, the 501(c)(3) nonprofit Nkwusm Salish Language Revitalization Institute opened a language survival school in Arlee, Montana, on the Flathead Reservation. The reservation is home to the 7,500 member Confederated Tribes of the Salish and Kootenai, including 60 fluent, first language speakers of the Salish Pend D'Oreille dialect. Between 2002 and 2011, over 30 fluent speakers passed away.

Nkwusm provides a complete education in the Salish language, mathematics, science, and social studies, and is dedicated to the promotion and preservation of the Salish

language and culture. Most of Nkwusm's curriculum is taught in Salish. In 2008, the school provided 39 students an average of 1,200 hours per year of instruction through the Salish language. Prior to this project, between 2002 and 2008, the school had succeeded in creating 10 highly proficient speakers of the language.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The project's purpose was to enhance school instruction by creating teaching and learning materials, guides, and assessment tools facilitating a more effective, sequenced, and systematic kindergarten through eighth grade course of study. The first objective was to create a nine-level, culturally relevant curriculum guide in Salish language arts, mathematics, and science, and to develop high quality teaching and learning materials for primary level students. To accomplish this, the Nkwusm executive director created a curriculum department, comprised of a curriculum director and five curriculum specialists, who worked for three years with three fluent language specialists and three Nkwusm teachers to create nine levels of kindergarten through eighth grade curriculum in four disciplines: Salish language, mathematics, science, and social studies. The end product, the 128-page

“Changing Seasons Curriculum,” elucidated Nkwusm principles, values, and beliefs; described the Nkwusm language immersion model; and outlined standards and benchmarks for each grade level. The department produced five lessons with instructional aides for each curriculum level in each subject. Moreover, with help from with six local artists and several community members and story tellers, the team wrote or assembled 25 professionally published primary level children's books, all in Salish, with illustrations and pictures.

The second objective was to create a Salish fluency level assessment instrument to gauge student mastery of oral fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and listening comprehension, and to provide an evaluative measure of instruction. To achieve this, Nkwusm’s executive director formed a partnership with the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), a nationally-recognized Washington, DC-based nonprofit organization that provides wide ranging services, information, and resources related to language and culture.

Using the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) English fluency assessment standards as a guide, CAL consultants worked with Nkwusm staff to develop an oral proficiency rating scale for the Salish language. The Nkwusm/CAL team created the scale by inserting Salish language structures and functions into ACTFL’s structured rubric and modifying it to include features unique to the Salish language. After creating the assessment standards, the team, using CAL’s Student Oral Proficiency Assessment (SOPA) instrument as a template, created a set of language usage tasks to assess student knowledge and skill in Salish. The tool they developed enabled Nkwusm staff to evaluate the extent to which students can use key Salish grammatical structures, speak with fluency, and understand vocabulary. Next,

CAL consultants provided SOPA training for 15 Nkwusm staff members. After completing the training, staff began to test the tasks with students, eventually integrating this process into the curriculum.

In addition to developing curricula, materials, and language assessment tools, the Nkwusm team made efforts to share its expertise with the reservation community, providing 43 teachers from reservation school districts with training in Salish language teaching methodologies and Total Physical Response storytelling.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The project enabled the Nkwusm team to develop an academic curriculum and Salish language fluency assessment standards, create a significant number of high quality books and learning materials, and train staff and others in teaching and assessment. New materials include 25 published books and dozens of unpublished books utilizing Salish coyote stories, contemporary tales, and original stories written by team members. The books are already being used by teachers and youth at each curriculum level.

According to curriculum specialist Chaney Bell, the new curriculum is already benefitting Nkwusm: “The curriculum benchmarks for each subject at each grade level serve as a useful tool, enabling teachers to ensure that kids learn the Salish language and life ways while ensuring that generally accepted academic standards are met.” Executive Director Tachini Pete stated the new language proficiency assessment standards were also having an immediate impact: “The standards and SOPA tasks have helped us see what is lacking in our current program of instruction, pointing out what we know and what we don't know. We now know what gaps we have to fill in our teaching and learning, and we can modify what we're doing to more effectively and efficiently encourage language development.

PIEGAN INSTITUTE, INC.



Project Title:	Nizipuhwahsin Blackfeet Immersion Program
Award Amount:	\$599,068
Type of Grant:	Language
Project Period:	Sept. 2008 – Sept. 2011
Grantee Type:	Native Nonprofit

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 4 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 40 elders involved
- 24 youth involved
- 5 individuals trained
- 4 partnerships formed
- 3 language teachers trained
- 25 youth increased their ability to speak a native language
- 10 adults increased their ability to speak a native language
- 12 people achieved fluency in a native language

BACKGROUND

The Piegan Institute, founded in 1987, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Browning, Montana, created to research, promote, and preserve the language of the Blackfeet Nation. Of the Blackfeet Nation's 15,743 people, only 20 are fluent speakers, most of whom are over 70 years of age.

Between 1996 and 2008, Piegan Institute programs succeeded in creating 13 proficient Blackfoot speakers, all children in Piegan's Cutswood or Nizipuhwahsin

School. The Nizipuhwahsin School has 25 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Since 1995, when the school opened, 102 students have graduated. Almost all of these students have demonstrated success at higher levels of education, becoming the best students in their high schools, regularly going on to college, and having careers in business, the military, and other endeavors. This is in stark contrast to the majority of youth on the Blackfeet Reservation, 65 percent of whom do not even graduate from high school.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the project was to increase the number of fluent, proficient Blackfeet speakers, and to build the capacity of Nizipuhwahsin immersion program staff to provide ongoing instruction using a Blackfeet language medium.

The first objective was to train at least three prospective teachers to be fluent in the Blackfeet language and able to teach kindergarten through eighth grade immersion classes. In year one, the school's master teacher and executive director worked together to train an apprentice teacher in Blackfeet and in language teaching methodologies, particularly in

active language techniques such as Total Physical Response. The apprentice learned by observing experienced teachers, teaching in teams and alone, developing curricula and lesson plans, creating language teaching materials, assessing student learning, and performing other functions required of Nizipuhwahsin teachers. In years two and three, Nizipuhwahsin staff and two new apprentices repeated the process, resulting in two more apprentices learning the Blackfoot language and being prepared to teach in an immersion setting. The new teachers learned not only how to teach the language, but also how to teach other subjects, such as math, science, and social studies, using both Blackfoot and English as media for instruction. During the project, two experienced teachers also received Blackfoot language training, improving their ability to use and teach the language.

The second objective was to graduate 12 children from the Nizipuhwahsin program with high level conversational Blackfoot language speaking skills, placing special emphasis on seventh and eighth grade students. To accomplish this, teachers and apprentices used a 60-lesson linguistics-based language curriculum developed in partnership with the University of Montana to teach the school's older youth. Because the class sizes at Nizipuhwahsin are very small, teachers were able to assess understanding and proficiency on an ongoing basis with each student, moving ahead based on how effectively students mastered the material and how well they were able to converse with teachers and elder speakers. Additionally, students were given various opportunities each year to use the language outside of school, including at traditional tribal and community ceremonies. These events enabled them to share what they had learned and to celebrate

their Blackfeet heritage with the larger community.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

During the project period, senior teachers and the Piegan Institute's executive director were able to prepare three new instructors for the rigors of teaching at the Nizipuhwahsin School, facilitating within them a strong understanding of the Blackfoot language and how to teach using immersion techniques. Two of these teachers currently work at the school, providing students with the tools to use their language and to succeed in society at large.

Ten students developed a deep conversational proficiency in the Blackfoot language, and each of the school's students, at least 25 in three years, significantly improved their ability to speak the language. According to project staff, the Cutswood youth are very respected by tribal members, and are often utilized to deliver opening prayers at ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. These students are expected by tribal members to be the main carriers of the language into the distant future. "We are trying to produce fluent speakers in small chunks – maybe four or five a year," said Darrell Kipp, Piegan Institute Executive Director, "and if we can do this over an extended period of time, we'll be able to create a community of speakers who will be able to use the Blackfoot language long into the future."

"Our most important focus, above all other things, is to teach the language to the kids, to keep the Blackfoot language alive. We try to remember that and to incorporate it into everything we do."

Darrell Kipp, Piegan Institute
Executive Director