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## FRIENDS OF THE AKWESÁSNE FREEDOM SCHOOL, INC.




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<b>Project Title:</b>	Orihwakaionhneha – “In the Manner of the Old Ways”
<b>Award Amount:</b>	\$376,952
<b>Type of Grant:</b>	Language
<b>Project Period:</b>	Sept. 2008 – Sept. 2011
<b>Grantee Type:</b>	Native Nonprofit

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### PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 3 full-time equivalent jobs created
- \$168,025 in resources leveraged
- 30 individuals trained
- 26 partnerships formed
- 190 native language classes held
- 160 youth increased their ability to speak a native language
- 24 youth achieved fluency in a native language

### BACKGROUND

The Friends of the Akwesasne Freedom School, Inc. is located in the community of Ahnawhàhte, in northern New York. The nonprofit was formed to support the Akwesasne Freedom School (AFS), a Mohawk immersion school founded in 1979. For over two decades, Friends of the Akwesasne Freedom School has fundraised to support the infrastructure, construction, and operations of the school; written grant proposals to benefit the school; and provided financial management for grants received.

Prior to this project, AFS ran a pre-kindergarten through grade six immersion program that received accolades for student achievement in Mohawk fluency. School

leadership recognized once students moved into the AFS English transition program in seventh grade, which focused on preparation for local English-based high schools, students quickly lost Mohawk fluency.

### PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement an immersion component in grades seven and eight at AFS to address the significant loss of fluency occurring in the English transition program.

The project’s first objective was to hire staff to develop and finalize eight cultural and eight scientific curriculum units in the Mohawk language, or Kanien’keha. To accomplish this, AFS hired two cultural educators, one of whom is deeply versed in Kanien’keha stories and traditions and was tasked with developing the cultural curriculum. The other educator, a PhD-trained scientist, was tasked with shaping the science curriculum and providing project oversight. The educators developed 16 curriculum units, using visual aids such as colorful posters and wall-length storyboards to enhance concepts. They also created 13 instructional books and one workbook to convey cultural lessons, including units titled “Creation Story Narrative,” the “Good Word Narrative,” and the “Great Law

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Narrative.” Science lessons took a cross-cultural approach, teaching a range of topics, including cell anatomy, avian anatomy and habits, plant life cycle, marine ecosystems, sustainable agriculture, and traditional native knowledge of agriculture and lunar cycles.

The project’s second objective was to teach the cultural and science curricula to seventh and eighth grade students in an immersion environment for 10 months. The educators achieved this objective, and brought the lessons to life; they planted a school garden, conducted canning workshops to teach youth about nutrition and chemistry, and engaged youth in plank-cutting, deer tracking and butchering, and knife-making to teach them traditional vocabulary. Students learned science lessons through field trips to a variety of locations, including the Ithaca Sciencenter, the Ecomuseum in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, and the Potsdam planetarium. Students also learned to identify and say the Mohawk words for medicine plants surrounding AFS buildings.

The third project objective was to increase intergenerational language learning between elders, middle school students, and elementary school students. To accomplish this, the middle school students took leadership roles in the Sun and Moon and Midwinter ceremonies by providing direction to the elementary school students in Mohawk vocabulary. Through this project, 13 middle-school youth also participated in the five-month AFS rites of passage program, experiencing traditional rites such as fasting and participating in a sweat lodge under the guidance of aunts, uncles, elders, and the cultural educators.

#### **OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

Prior to this project, AFS did not have an immersion program for its seventh and eighth grade classes. Originally intending to

teach half-Mohawk immersion and half-English in the middle school, AFS exceeded its goal and taught both grades in full Mohawk immersion by the end of the project period.

Because of this project, AFS was able to harness the memory, training, and wisdom of one of the cultural educators, a key community elder figure, and record his knowledge in the form of curricula and recordings. AFS also communicated important scientific concepts for the middle school into Mohawk, using creative and engaging teaching methods that reverberated with parents as the youth brought lessons home. Entire families benefited from this project; parents, aunts and uncles participated in the rites of passage program, and middle-school students became role models for the younger children of Ahnawhàhte. As program staff said, “It’s not just the child that learns, but the parents that come along with them.”

Furthermore, tribal school officials from North Carolina and Massachusetts visited Ahnawhàhte to learn about AFS’ teaching methods and curriculum, engaging in an important dialogue about what language learning approaches are effective in their communities.

Without this project, AFS would not have been able to develop immersion curricula and lesson plans for the middle school grades. Project staff noted that this project also curbed the loss of fluency among middle school youth and increased parental support of immersion programming, laying the groundwork for the next goal: expanding the immersion program past the middle grades into the high school years.

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## NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SERVICES OF ERIE AND NIAGARA COUNTIES

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<b>Project Title:</b>	Haudenosaunee Empowerment through Language Preservation (HELP) Project
<b>Award Amount:</b>	\$271,314
<b>Type of Grant:</b>	Language
<b>Project Period:</b>	Sept. 2009 – Sept. 2011
<b>Grantee Type:</b>	Native Nonprofit

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### PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 3 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 11 elders involved
- \$33,190 in resources leveraged
- 12 partnerships formed
- 1 adult increased her ability to speak a native language

### BACKGROUND

Native American Community Services of Erie and Niagara Counties, Inc. (NACS) is a nonprofit organization that has served the social and economic needs of Native American populations since 1975, primarily in the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls. NACS mainly serves the native communities of the Haudenosaunee, or Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy.

At the time of this grant, NACS strove to bring more language resources to the urban communities in Erie and Niagara Counties. Based on over 25 years of experience, NACS believed loss of native languages in urban communities contributed to a lack of positive cultural identity and a weak link between the community and traditional

teachings, language, culture, values and family models.

Through a 2005-06 ANA grant, NACS conducted a language assessment revealing that 91 percent of the adults surveyed would like to learn one or more native languages. Those surveyed primarily wanted to learn the Haudenosaunee languages (those spoken by the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora people). Interest in language has been consistent, as a subsequent survey in 2009 found that over 80 percent of community members were still interested in learning a native language.

### PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the Haudenosaunee Empowerment through Language Preservation (HELP) project was to design a Haudenosaunee language program tailored for the urban community that would include formal instruction and expand community access to additional language learning resources.

The project's first objective was to research an existing Mohawk language immersion school model and adapt that model to develop a language curriculum appropriate for the urban communities of Buffalo and

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Niagara Falls. NACS focused on developing a Mohawk curriculum for this project, because the community survey indicated a higher interest in learning the Mohawk language (Kanyen'kéha) than in learning the other five Haudenosaunee languages.

To achieve this objective, the project director planned to hire a resource specialist to attend the two-year Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa Mohawk immersion program. However, there was a delay in hiring the resource specialist, which resulted in her missing the enrollment period for the program. To overcome this challenge, the project director hired a private instructor from the program to hold more intense learning sessions with the resource specialist. The private instruction enabled her to learn the entire two-year curriculum within eight months. After completing the immersion program, she applied her increased knowledge of Mohawk and language learning methodologies to create new curriculum content. The curriculum contained a year's worth of Mohawk lessons appropriate for NACS' urban community.

The second objective was to reach over 400 community members to present the project's work, gather community input, and cultivate greater community interest and participation in local language preservation and maintenance. Through social dances, elder luncheons, the opening of a language resource library, outreach at the University of Buffalo, and the NACS newsletter, project staff reached approximately 2,000 community members.

The third objective was to increase the amount of language resources and tools available for learning the six primary native languages of NACS' target community. To accomplish this objective, the resource specialist planned, renovated space, and collected books for a language resource library. The library was finished by the

project's end, and houses over 900 items, including self-paced computer-based learning technology for the Mohawk language. During the second year, the resource specialist also developed a self-paced Mohawk language kit, a small workbook containing the essential vocabulary and conversational patterns for a beginner speaker. Using this kit as a template, she contacted language experts in the other five Haudenosaunee languages and enlisted their expertise to create additional kits, which were in progress at the end of the project period.

#### **OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

In addition to developing a Mohawk language curriculum, creating a native languages resource library, and producing a self-paced language kit, this project was able to produce one high-intermediate speaker of the Mohawk language.

Through outreach, the project taught urban communities about the commitment required to learn language in an immersion setting, and began a dialogue about what type of language courses would be appropriate. In addition, project staff formed relationships with speakers in the reservation communities who may serve as instructors for the NACS language program, reinforcing meaningful ties between the urban and reservation communities.

Furthermore, this project enabled project staff to set up an implementation plan for a NACS native language program by expanding their pedagogical resources and strengthening relationships with local universities and colleges. With these relationships and capacity in place, NACS has many of the essential elements needed to implement and sustain a language program in the coming years.

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## NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SERVICES OF ERIE AND NIAGARA COUNTIES

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<b>Project Title:</b>	Native Economic Self-Sufficiency Training Project
<b>Award Amount:</b>	\$327,756
<b>Type of Grant:</b>	Social and Economic Development Strategies
<b>Project Period:</b>	Sept. 2008 – Sept. 2011
<b>Grantee Type:</b>	Native Nonprofit

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### PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 3 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 35 elders involved
- 60 youth involved
- \$79,440 in resources leveraged
- 20 partnerships formed

### BACKGROUND

Native American Community Services of Erie and Niagara Counties, Inc. (NACS) is a nonprofit organization serving social and economic needs of Native American populations in the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls since 1975. NACS' service community consists of Mohawk, Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga, Oneida, and Tuscarora populations.

Buffalo and Niagara Falls are economically distressed cities, with substantial Native American populations who live in poverty. According to the 2005-09 American Community Survey, 50 percent of Buffalo's Native American population and 26 percent of the Native American population in Niagara Falls have an income below the federal poverty level. Project staff estimate about 85 percent of NACS clients are

unemployed, and three-fourths of the disabled client population are not enrolled for social service benefits.

Furthermore, in a community survey conducted by NACS, 65 percent of respondents desired assistance with personal finances, 66 percent indicated interest in money management workshops, and 80 percent wanted to learn native cultural teachings related to financial health. These results clearly demonstrated a community desire for programming to identify pathways out of poverty and broaden economic opportunity.

### PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project was to foster economic self-sufficiency in the Native American community of Erie and Niagara counties.

The project's first objective was to design a strategic plan that would coordinate community trainings and one-on-one services to improve economic stability of the community. Project staff envisioned the plan would include a summary of community needs, an assessment of resources available to meet those needs, and a strategy for addressing the needs. NACS hired an

economic self-sufficiency director to direct the project and complete the plan; unfortunately, there was a high degree of turnover for this position. Consequently, early information about the self-sufficiency plan's design and intent was not in place, and the plan could not be completed.

The project's second objective was to provide intake assessment services for native clients over a period of three years, helping them identify eligibility for public services such as food stamps, Medicaid, health services and heat and energy assistance, and assisting them with the enrollment process. Project staff used two Web-based programs, the Self-Sufficiency Calculator and Mybenefits.ny.gov, to assist 270 clients in identifying appropriate benefits and facilitating enrollment.

The project's third objective was to engage 310 participants in financial management trainings and workshops. Project staff received training in the Building Native Communities and Power Families financial education curricula, which reflect native traditions and values. NACS hired two economic self-sufficiency specialists who conducted a nine-week training using the Powerful Families Financial Education curriculum, a nine-week training in the Powerful Families Action and Advocacy curriculum, and a six-week training in the Building Native Communities curriculum, reaching 259 participants.

In addition, project staff taught 73 youth financial management through NACS' Junior Achievement summer program, hosted speaker series events on the topic of self-sufficiency, and helped direct over 63 clients to homebuyers workshops provided by partnering banks in the area, including Key Bank, Bank of America, First Niagara, and HSBC.

## **OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

Over 270 individuals who received intake assessments now have a better understanding of how to access public benefits, and 15 percent have enrolled for benefits with the assistance of NACS staff. In addition, the Powerful Families curriculum taught families how to differentiate between banks, credit unions and payday lenders, understand credit records, balance a check book, and manage credit cards and interest rates. One participant had never saved in a goal-oriented manner before, and successfully saved for and purchased a large item as a result of the training, saying, "This program made me realize I needed to save for a rainy day."

Furthermore, trainings taught participants how to navigate education and social services systems and advocate for themselves. Having gained financial literacy and advocacy skills, project participants now have an increased capacity to achieve and sustain economic self-sufficiency for their families and the community.