



Myth Busters: Facts about the Work of Peaceful Means

Peaceful Means operates a program that protects Lakota children. Based on the IMpower curriculum and fortified with Lakota values and virtues, we use a program that has been shown successfully globally and on another Lakota reservation to successfully reduce sexual assault. This program builds confidence and skills, teaches kids they are worth protecting and so are others, gives them a voice, and provides them with hope. While sexual assault can be an uncomfortable topic, we must talk about it in evidence-informed and culturally grounded ways, or it will remain a crisis on Pine Ridge. We understand that a number of mistruths about our work have been circulating. On the front and back of the sheet, we provide you with factual information to hopefully gain your support for our important and Lakota-led work. Please always know you can reach out to us with questions or concerns. We value community input deeply as this is a Lakota-led movement that will have far reaching impacts now and for future generations of the Lakota oyate (people). Below is a list of rumors that have come to our attention. We address each of them in order below in more detail so you can make up your own mind about this program.

FAST FACTS: We Protect Children, Not Harm Them

Rumor	Fact Check
Tons of kids have dropped out of the IMpower program and have been harmed!	Only 5 (of 372!) stopped attending programming and 0 reported harm.
This is an African program not a Lakota program.	This is a universal prevention program adapted for communities all over the world. Here on Pine Ridge, Lakota instructors teach Lakota virtues in all programming.
We teach kids to be violent! We make kids who are raped blame themselves! We will get kids hurt or killed!	This program saves lives and helps kids feel better about themselves. It reduces sexual violence. It reduces blame among survivors of sexual violence.
We show naked bodies!	We show a poster of kids in bathing suits to teach the names of private parts which is evidence-based like all that we do.
We lie about our research findings!	People misunderstand research often. We are happy to clarify. Our research is rigorous, accurate, and ethical.
We were kicked out of another Sovereign Nation!	The work was ended by COVID on good terms.
We were kicked out of schools!	Nearly all schools on the reservation have expressed desire to participate. We have never been asked to leave a school.
We don't do anything when a kid tells us about a sexual assault!	We follow all applicable laws and policies. Keeping children safe is our number one priority.
We don't follow OST protocols or committee "shop"! We employ criminals!	We comply with all policies and protocols. We have all needed approvals in place. Everyone goes through a background check and is vetted.
We take advantage of economically disadvantaged people to do this work!	We give guardians a \$20 gift card for filling out the permission slip regardless of if they say YES or NO if their child can participate. This is a way to show respect for people's time.
This program is just a way for white people to make money!	We have over 30 Lakota staff with quality jobs. This work is not about making money or winning awards. It's about protecting Lakota children.
IMpower classes treat boys and perpetrators only and girls as victims only.	IMpower acknowledges that anyone can be a victim and/or perpetrator of sexual violence. IMpower empowers ALL youth!



Myth Busters: Facts about the Work of Peaceful Means

Rumor: Tons of kids have dropped out of IMpower programming and have been harmed and traumatized!

Fact Check: Only 5 (of 372!) stopped attending and 0 reported harm.

Further Information: Parents/guardians get to decide if they want to have their kids participate. If parents/guardians say “yes” the kid can say “no.” Anyone can change their mind about participating. Having people decide a program is not for them is 100% normal and to be expected. Still, only 5 kids have been withdrawn (this is only 1.3%!). None of the kids have reported any kind of harm from participating. We did hear from one kid that they were uncomfortable. We are talking about hard things; it is completely expected that some kids will be uncomfortable – just as they may be when getting vaccinated or eating their vegetables. We continually monitor children for any negative effects from participation. What we are seeing is kids are telling us very positive things about this program and how it is impacting their lives now and forever! Finally, this program has reached over 500,000 children across the globe; there has never been a report of a child being harmed from IMpower.

Rumor: This is an African program not a Lakota program!

Fact Check: We teach Lakota virtues and culture in all programming.

Further Information: The program that we are offering is an empowerment self-defense curriculum that has been implemented all around the world – including in Africa. It is used globally because it works! Wherever it is implemented, the people in the community adapt the program to meet their needs. In Pine Ridge, our Lakota staff, Elder and adult advisory boards, and children/youth advisory board continually work to make sure Lakota virtues are front and center in everything we teach. For example, our boys program teaches nonviolence through returning to traditional Lakota ways of treating women and children. Boys focus on what kind of Lakota man they want to be and how to live and walk in Lakota virtues and values including honoring girls and women. Everything we teach is also rooted in the Lakota virtue of bravery—bravery to do the right thing, bravery to stand up for yourself, and bravery to stand up for others and be a good relative.

Rumor: We teach kids to be violent! We make kids who are raped blame themselves! We will get kids hurt or killed!

Fact Check: This program saves lives and helps kids feel better about themselves now and in their futures. It reduces violence.

Further Information: Empowerment self-defense teaches kids (K to 5 kids and middle and high school girls) that perpetrators are to blame for sexual assault while also teaching them that they are worth defending. It teaches kids to recognize risk and resist an attacker using verbal and physical skills, how to judge when it is safe to do so, and that it is not their fault if they do not resist (e.g. they freeze). Research shows that girls who take this program have more self-confidence, stronger feelings of worth, can be healing to those with prior assaults, and empowers them to act in their own best interest.

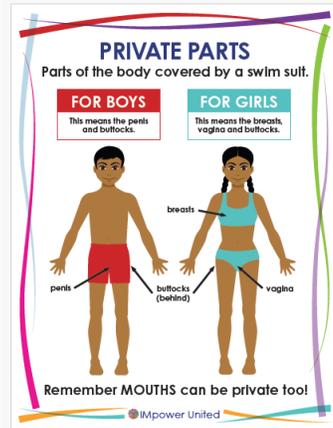


Myth Busters: Facts about the Work of Peaceful Means

Rumor: We show naked bodies!

Fact Check:

We show bathing suits to teach the names of private parts.



Further Information: On the left you can see for yourself the actual image used in class. We teach kids to use the correct names for their private parts and that mouths can also be private. We do this because it is important to not send the message that it is embarrassing or wrong to talk about their bodies. Research clearly shows that this is important for kids to learn the correct names for their body parts. Kids that do are more likely to tell someone when someone tries to or does touch them in a bad way, are understood by trusted adults when they try to tell and are seen as less vulnerable by potential abusers. Talking about body parts can be uncomfortable but is so important to talk about to keep them safe.

Rumor: We lie about our research findings!

Fact Check:

People misunderstand research. We are happy to clarify.

Further Information: All our research is approved through the OST RRB and undergoes a rigorous peer-review process with outside researchers making sure we are accurate and transparent. When people say we claim to have “ended sexual assault” or “reduced sexual violence by 80%” on another reservation, they do not fully understand the research. What we found is that the empowerment self-defense program reduced rates of sexual violence by 80% over a six-month period among girls who received the program compared to girls who did not (see [here](#)). We do not know if the reduction continued after that six-months or the effect the program had on boys because COVID ended the project. However, we are working with OST RRB to continually research the effects of the program here and will update you.

Rumor: We were kicked out of another Sovereign Nation!

Fact Check:

The work was ended by COVID on good terms.

Further Information: We were operating a pilot study (linked in the additional resources) when COVID-19 hit and sent kids home from schools. This ended the program on this reservation. We were never removed, asked to leave, or operated without tribal approvals. We still work with this Tribe on other projects and some of the leaders from that initial project are employed on Peaceful Means to help develop it for the OST.



Myth Busters: Facts about the Work of Peaceful Means

Rumor: We were kicked out of schools!

Fact Check:

Most schools on or near the rez are planning to participate in our work.

Further Information: We have not been asked to stop programming in any school. We have never heard of any school board that would like us to stop operating either. We have just signed ongoing memorandums of understanding with schools about our program delivery. Instead of schools asking us to leave, the opposite has happened. Tribal Nations across the nation are asking for this program to come to their reservation. Our goal is to have the Lakota staff at Peaceful Means on Pine Ridge lead this expansion in years to come.

Rumor: We don't do anything when a kid tells us about a sexual assault!

Fact Check:

We follow all applicable laws and policies when child disclosures abuse to us.

Further Information: Our program asks kids to “tell and tell and tell and tell” until someone believes them, and they get the help they need. Because we expect more kids to disclose (tell someone about a sexual assault), we have protocols in place for how to handle disclosures consistent with applicable laws and policies. We have resource sheets for kids with local and national places for support. All instructors are mandatory reporters and are intensively trained. We are also increasing support for all Lakota oyate of all ages and genders who have experienced sexual assault through SIRA (Survivors in Recovery Anonymous) and will be providing more details about that program in coming months.

Rumor: We don't follow OST protocols or committee “shop”!

Fact Check:

We comply with all policies and protocols. We have all needed approvals in place.

Further Information: Prior to applying for this grant (and others) we make sure we have approval from OST Health & Human Services (HHS) as required. For research projects, we apply for approvals through the OST Research Review Board (RRB).

Rumor: We employ criminals!

Fact Check:

Everyone goes through a background check and is vetted.

Further Information: Everyone employed by Peaceful Means is carefully vetted. This includes a background check with a criminal history check for public and court criminal conviction records (Federal, Global, Nationwide, Sex Offender and Statewide) going back a minimum of seven years. More information on the checks can be found [here](#). If the schools require additional checks, we do those too. Our staff have the same checks as the teachers that work with your kids every day. Claims that we employ criminals or even pedophiles are completely unfounded.



Myth Busters: Facts about the Work of Peaceful Means

Rumor: We take advantage of economically disadvantaged people to do this work!

Fact Check: We give guardians a \$20 gift card for filling out the permission slip regardless of if they say YES or NO if their child can participate.

Further Information: Only kids with written guardian permission are allowed to participate in our program and the pre- and post-surveys. Everyone who wants it gets a Virtual Visa gift card for \$20 simply for returning the form – it doesn't matter if they give permission for participation or say their kid cannot participate. Remember, even if parents say "yes" the kids can still say "no." Consent is a core virtue we teach and live by. We provide funds not to coerce people to participate, but to respect and honor the time it takes to read the form and learn about our work.

Rumor: We are collecting information about kids that is intrusive.

Fact Check: Surveys are anonymous and NOT connected to name and contact information used to get people their incentives.

Further Information: Research is important to ensure that programs like IMpower are working to reduce sexual violence and promote positive youth development. Results can support other Indigenous communities deciding to participate in IMpower and help to secure funding to sustain IMpower on Pine Ridge. Students in grades 3-12 (we will not survey K-2 students) will complete age-appropriate surveys that have been used in research across the nation, including with Indigenous youth, to ensure that IMpower is making things like sexual violence happen less and things like mattering, empowerment, and hope for the future happen more. Surveys provide important information to help youth on Pine Ridge for years to come and can help schools have the information they need to support positive futures for students. Please keep in mind the following: (1) Youth will only take surveys with written guardian permission; (2) Surveys will be available to school personnel and caregivers to review before they are offered to students; (3) We will be working soon with our Advisory Boards on refining surveys; (4) Surveys are optional and short; youth can also skip questions they do not want to answer; (5) Surveys are anonymous (no names, etc. are collected on the surveys); (6) Surveys are not upsetting for most youth and youth who report being upset during or after taking surveys will be connected to the appropriate resources in the school and community; (7) Surveys do not cause youth to engage in risky behaviors. The full survey is available for viewing on our website. Finally, the OST owns the data.

Rumor: This program is just a way for White people to make money!

Fact Check: We have over 30 Lakota staff with quality jobs. This work is not about making money or winning awards. It's about protecting Lakota children.

Further Information: This program is paid for out of a grant from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to Dr. Katie Edwards for \$3.2 million. We have locally hired Lakota relatives working on the project and active members on our youth, adult, and elder advisory boards who are compensated for their time. Those who work for the project receive highly competitive wages and most qualify for healthcare and paid vacation and sick days. The Lakota staff are co-leaders in this work and will one day fully run what is intended to be a nonprofit organization.



Myth Busters: Facts about the Work of Peaceful Means

Rumor: IMpower classes treat boys as perpetrators only and girls as victims only.

Fact Check:

IMpower acknowledges that anyone can be a victim and/or perpetrator of sexual violence. IMpower empowers ALL youth!

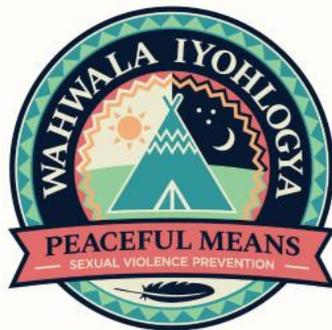
Further Information: IMpower classes are empowerment classes. Girls and boys are taught to recognize the ways in which gender-based violence shows up in their lives and effectively respond. We teach youth of all genders the skills to stand up, speak out, and counter any violence directed at them – regardless of who perpetrates it. Also, IMpower Instructors regularly bring up the fact that women and girls can and do perpetrate violence and that men and boys can be the victims of it. Not only do Instructors share personal stories attesting to this dynamic, but the students also share experiences that highlight the ways in which violence impacts youth of all genders.

Additional Resources:

We are happy to provide you with any additional information. Here are some places to start:

- In a pilot program on another reservation, this program reduced rates of sexual violence by 80% over a six-month period among girls who received the program compared to girls who did not. The study is [here](#) or contact us for a copy! We also published a paper on perceptions of IMpower (see [here](#)) and examined IMpower among upper elementary school children (see [here](#)).
- [Here](#) is information from another university that is not affiliated with our program that talks about the benefits and the myths surrounding empowerment self-defense.
- [Enough Abuse](#) provides more information on why it is important to use the correct names for body parts.
- Want more information on how this work is coming along on Pine Ridge? Visit our [website](#), follow us on [Facebook](#), and/or contact us via phone (605-430-9575) or email (peacefulmeans@unl.edu).

Wopila Tanka!



Wahwala Iyohlogya (Peaceful Means)