

RAPID CITY FAMILY PROJECT

COMMUNITY REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF THE TIWAHE WICAGWICAYAPI PROGRAM



“A cornerstone of Lakota culture can be summed up in the words of family and kinship. Family is the backbone, the foundation of our culture. We are given substance, nurtured, and sustained by family. Kinship goes beyond family and is the connection we feel to the world at large and everything in it...”

-Joseph Marshall III (Lakota Elder)

Background and Overview

Research shows there are high rates and negative outcomes of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs include (but are not limited to) child abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence. The purpose of this project was to create a program for residents of Rapid City to **prevent** ACEs from happening. We conducted research to see what the community thinks about the program (*Do families like it?*) and if the program is working (*Does the program prevent ACEs?*). The program focused on youth ages 10 to 14 and their caregivers. The program was created for families in Rapid City who are Native American and/or struggling financially. The voices of children and families have been at the center of developing the program and making sure the research procedures are safe and acceptable.

Programming

The community named the strengths-focused, family-based, culturally grounded program ***Tiwahe Wicagwicayapi*** (Lakota for Strengthening/Growing Families). Each of the seven sessions is named after a Lakota virtue. All sessions include Lakota language, history, and traditions. The program is taught by mostly Native American adults. The program promotes family bonding and communication and teaches skills to prevent ACEs, like child abuse. Each session begins with a family meal followed by mini break-out sessions for children and caregivers before families come back together at the end. Session activities include talking circles, art activities, games, and cultural activities.

Research

124 families (194 children and 124 caregivers) participated in the project. Children and caregivers completed surveys three times. Some families participated in the program in between the surveys and others participated in the program after the last survey. The results from the evaluation showed that the *Tiwahe Wicagwicayapi* program led to reductions in ACEs, harsh parenting, intimate partner violence, caregiver and child depression, and child externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression). The program led to increases in caregiver social support and caregiver cultural connection. The program did not change some things like family communication or children’s cultural connection, which may be due to how we measured these things and/or that the program may need some changes to have even more positive impacts.

Families also reported that they liked the program and that it had a positive impact on them. The Table on the next page reflects a few quotes from participants about the impact of the program.

If You Have Any Questions About This Research Project, Please Contact Us At

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Caregiver Quotes:

- “[I liked] learning about love, and different way of showing it to your children, and close loved ones. [I liked learning] the Lakota language.”
- “I really enjoyed making the tobacco ties with my son. It was a great bonding moment, also we wouldn't have learned how to do it otherwise. Pilamayaya.”
- “I will be more courageous so I can set a better example for my children.”

Children Quotes:

- “[I liked learning] when I walk into my house to leave all the negativity at the door.”
- “[I liked learning] about the medicine wheel and about medicine ties. We learned about our future and what we wanted to be.”
- “[I liked learning about] telling other people about how to be in a healthy relationship, also teaching myself how to be non-toxic, and about how to treat myself better.”

Concluding Thoughts

The *Tiwahe Wicagwicayapi* program holds great promise in reducing ACEs among Native American children and/or children living in poverty. The program also moved the needle on a number of other outcomes showing potential promise for widespread public health impact.

Acknowledgements

We have the utmost gratitude for the project staff, advisory board members, and caregivers and children who participated in this project. Without each of you, this work would not have been possible. Wopila Tanka.



“Safety is the presence of connections. Plant medicines around. What we need is healing. We are connected. Lakota relatives being strong together—our spirituality, prayers, and songs make it feel safe. An intergenerational home with grandparents, parents, and grandchildren giving and sharing.”

-Lakota Caregiver



“Before you are born, your family prepares for you. They take a lot of time making your moccasins and getting everyone ready for your arrival. They do this because they love you and want to support you. As you grow, your initial pair of moccasins won't fit. Your family keeps making you new ones that fit you. It's the same thing with boundaries. Your family gives you boundaries like structure and rules of kinship so you can grow and be safe.”

-Lakota Child

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