



A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF ALL THAT HAS TRANSPIRED WITH THE YMCA ALUMNI NATIONAL SERVICE PROJECT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE YMCA OF THE SEVEN COUNCIL FIRES.

By Steve Rowe

YMCA Alumni is comprised of more than 1,700 retired YMCA professionals, spouses and partners. The YMCA Alumni National Board of Directors completed a Strategic Plan in 2020 with a goal to strengthen the “Serve” component to “*Connect, Travel and Serve,*” the organization’s guideposts.

- The board appointed Lou Falk, then its Vice President East, as chair. He asked the 17 Chapter Presidents to appoint a representative to serve on a Task Force. The aim was to research and select a project that would benefit a deserving YMCA or YMCAs, while involving chapters and its members in a meaningful multi-year volunteer service project.

- The Task Force met for several months and developed the guidelines for evaluating the projects and requested potential project summaries be submitted to the Task Force for consideration. They reviewed the 37 projects submitted which were evaluated based on these attributes: challenging, achievable, sustainable, impactful, donor appeal, and involvement.

- A proposal submitted by the Allen-Stone chapter from the YMCA of the Seven Council Fires (formerly the Sioux YMCA) to build a Tiny Home Village and community based “Twigs” (small branches or program centers) based

on their community needs assessment and strategic plan, was unanimously recommended, and was approved by both the YMCA of the Seven Council Fires Board and the YMCA Alumni Board.

- Several of our YMCAs had built relationships with the Sioux YMCA and were currently or had previously supported the YMCA, and we knew it was crucial to involve the YMCA staff and board to ensure that the project would meet the needs of the reservation community.

- The Board established a National Service Project Standing Committee with full chapter representation. The committee developed a comprehensive implementation plan in collaboration with the YMCA of Seven Council Fires. Sub-committees developed Marketing and Communications, Fundraising, Volunteers, and Project Management plans. Each chapter recruited a representative for the NSP and is responsible for communicating and coordinating fundraising and volunteer participation.

- Regular updates are provided in *The CONNECTION*, chapter newsletters and on Facebook.

The YMCA of the Seven Council Fires

- The YMCA of Seven Council Fires is the only YMCA in the country on a Reservation and is a member of the YMCA of the USA, has a diverse Board of Directors and is supported by a dedicated Board of Trustees comprised of active and retired YMCA professionals and volunteers, which raises funds annually to support the operations of the YMCA.

- Andrew Corley has been CEO and Executive Director for more than eight years and provides excellent leadership to a growing YMCA operation.

- The YMCA operates after school programs, teen programs, day and resident camping programs, pre-school, sports, field trips, holiday events, an annual Global Indigenous Youth Conference, and a learning garden and serves 18,000 youth meals in the summer.
- The YMCA is primarily funded by grants and contributions as most families cannot afford to pay for programs.
- The programs serve youth and families that are spread out over approximately 5,000 square miles among isolated communities of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Reservation in South Dakota. There are currently 8,600 residents on the Reservation, 80 percent are Native American.
- The community on the Reservation faces social issues of isolation and remoteness as 35 percent of the population lives in poverty, including 71 percent of the children. Many youths do not know where they will sleep or from where their next meal is coming. Unemployment is high as is substance abuse, food insecurity, alcoholism, and suicide. Housing is insufficient and of poor quality. Living conditions are crowded. Three generations living together is not unusual.

An overview of the project

- The Tiny Home Village will provide transitional housing and the Twigs will provide YMCA youth and family programming in remote communities on the Reservation. The Tiny Home Village is located adjacent to the YMCA Volunteer Center in Dupree.
- Our project is one step in improving housing accessibility on the Reservation. The completion of the Tiny Home Village (four, 465-square-foot homes and two Twigs) will provide a foundation for the tribal community to invest in other housing opportunities. Existing and future partnerships with other organizations will provide the needed support services.

- YMCA volunteers, board, staff, and an architect (a YMCA Board member), designed the project. The YMCA Alumni Project Management Subcommittee (known as “Boots on the Ground”) also reviewed and provided input to the design. George Painter, YMCA’s Alumni volunteer project manager, is a YMCA retiree with 40 years’ experience building Y camp facilities as a YMCA professional. A local tribal contractor was retained in Year One to complete the foundations. Local contractors will be retained in the future for electrical, plumbing, and other needs beyond the scope of our volunteers. The Boots on the Ground Subcommittee manages the construction of the project with input from YMCA staff and Board and the NSP Standing Committee. The YMCA Alumni National Board approves the annual budget for the National Service Project.

- The YMCA will own and manage the homes, make decisions on the terms of each specific lease, and manage all aspects of the Twigs and programming in remote communities on the Reservation. The project will improve the housing and employment opportunities on the Reservation.

- The Tiny Home Village construction kicked off with the first wave of volunteers with a groundbreaking ceremony May 19, 2022. More than 500 YMCA Alumni members tuned into the festivities via Facebook live.

- The project is expected to be completed by the end of 2025 with the majority of work completed by volunteers. Volunteers from our 17 YMCA Alumni chapters, including friends and family and select other groups, traveled to Dupree to participate in one of the 15 weekly waves in the past two years. Although the primary role for the volunteers is helping with construction that matches their skill set, there are also volunteer administrative project roles so that funds raised go directly to the construction of the project. Construction volunteers also are treated to cultural education from the native population and an opportunity for some sightseeing while in Dupree.

- The Volunteer Subcommittee implements a training and recruitment plan for those working on the project. A safety manual was developed, and all

onsite volunteers receive an orientation which includes cultural information prior to traveling to Dupree. Construction volunteers can find registration information on the “Project page” of this website.

PROJECT FUNDRAISING AND BUDGET

- The Fundraising Subcommittee developed and is implementing a highly successful fundraising plan to raise the funds needed to complete the four-home Tiny Home Village and two Twigs. YMCA Alumni Chapter members contributed nearly \$600,000 in the first year. The second year’s effort focused on expanding our donor base to include friends and family and a process began to identify potential corporate donors and grants to support the project.

- We were careful to clear donor prospects with the YMCA of the Seven Council Fires with a goal to eliminate any conflicts.

- Some guidelines for fundraising were established that included:
 1. Fundraising windows of January 1 through March 31, 2022 and 2023, were established by the YMCA Alumni Board to minimize the impact on other fundraising campaigns. The NSP Chapter Rep is responsible for coordinating the fundraising for each chapter. The fundraising campaign is administered by volunteers with no paid staff with a goal of engaging as many chapter members as possible in this volunteer-driven project.

 2. Annual campaign donors to the YMCA of the Seven Council Fires are encouraged to continue their annual campaign support and consider an additional contribution to the NSP. Donor prospects, foundations, corporations, and government funding requests are cleared with the YMCA prior to approaching.

 3. Funds expended are based only on funds collected and not based on future pledges.

4. Pledges are encouraged to allow donors to increase their contribution over a two-to-three-year period.
 5. A donor recognition plan has been implemented to assure that donors are thanked appropriately for their generosity.
- The original three-year fundraising goal of \$600,000 was established based on a budget of our best estimation of expenses to complete a project in a very remote location with most of the labor completed by volunteers. In addition, volunteers also complete the administration of the project, so that the funds raised go directly to the construction of the project. The global pandemic and economic conditions we have all been facing, runaway inflation, scarce availability of building materials and extra-long delivery delays, all exacerbated by the remote location of the Reservation, increased costs of the project resulting in several revisions to the project budget. The current estimated cost and budget is \$850,000.
 - With the approval of the new budget, the committee agreed to complete the first phase of the project prior to any discussions about future phases.
 - The fundraising campaign for the project has been extremely successful and is a result of 100 percent involvement of our 17 chapters. A cumulative total of \$825,000 has been raised from 600 donors. Appropriate foundations and corporations have been researched, and proposals submitted for additional funding.
 - The Standing Committee annually reviews formal evaluations of the project from construction volunteers, the YMCA Alumni National Board, Chapter Presidents, and Committee members and makes adjustments based on feedback. In addition, the committee receives regular feedback from the Board and staff of the YMCA of Seven Council Fires.

