



# VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

Stories from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation

*"They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31*

March 2014

Wings As Eagles Ministries Newsletter

## The Forgotten Children of America

### Homeless and Displaced Children of Pine Ridge Reservation

#### A Call To Action

There are a high number of homeless and displaced children on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation each year. The Tribal Child Protection Service is understaffed, underfunded, and generally ill-equipped to deal with the overwhelming number of these children. As a result, many of the children cannot be properly placed. Some of the children are being "warehoused" in locations of up to 200 children. Some of the children sleep on office floors inside the Child Protection Service building, and many are placed back into the abusive and non-parental homes in which they were removed.

*The statistics are startling. Vital statistics as per the Tribal Child Protection Service - Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota, The Permaculture Guild Statistics Bureau, and the New York Times include:*

**Thousands** homeless or displaced children on Pine Ridge

**97%** of residents live below the federal poverty line

Infant mortality **800%** higher than US national average: highest on this continent

**60%** of homes are substandard lacking safe water, electricity, and sewage systems

Tuberculosis and Hepatitis A rates are **800%** higher than the US national average

Teacher turnover is **800%** higher than the US national average

Many children experience hunger on a daily basis

School dropout rate at an alarming **72%**

Teen suicide rate is **150%** higher than the US national average (US statistics)



The shelter will collaborate with the tribe to meet the needs of the children. The Tribal Child Protection Service will oversee busing the children to school, administer to medical needs, and assist in providing staffing. Due to the overwhelming need to locate these children to a safe and neutral location, WAEM is in a favorable position to assist in this endeavor. The Tribal Child Protection Service has reach out to us for help. WAEM is the only safe environment and established relief organization on the reservation.

Wings As Eagles Ministries has stood the test of time while pioneering ground breaking inroads into the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. WAEM is recognized and accepted as a part of the communities that it serves. ***We have seen the dark side of life on the reservation including homelessness, suicide, alcohol, disease, child abuse, and hunger.*** Together we can make a difference. Together we can save lives. Together we can show these children that life has more for them than suicide, alcohol, violence, drugs and abuse by offering a nurturing and educational environment, teaching life skills and a better way of life. We are also reaching a nation within the borders of our United States.

**These conditions are unacceptable inside our country. This nation on the Pine Ridge reservation is the poorest people group in the western hemisphere, second only to Haiti. Help us to bring a vital children's shelter to the Dream Center to house the homeless Native Youth with a safe environment that every child deserves.**

## A Beautiful Testimonial Letter From A Partner Who Served At The Ministry in December

My life changed one cold December day at a place 20 miles past nowhere called Potato Creek, South Dakota. I have had several friends ask me what has prompted my recent change in perspective and what has caused me to write about this part of my journey. There are many factors that have led up to where I am now. I guess we could all say that our entire lives up until this moment has led us to where we are. If you follow Christ, no time is ever wasted. I can however, point to one moment when I knew I could never be the same. It was one of those moments when God shows Himself so powerfully that even in that moment you know nothing will never be the same. It was a painful moment when all my self-worship, self-serving, self-indulgence got horribly exposed in a single instance. I saw my ridiculous obsession with owning "things" for what it really was and all my plastic religion was set in the full Light, exposing everything about me I was afraid might be true, but had hoped was not. It is a painful memory to say the least.

I had gone to the Pine Ridge reservation to help with the Christmas celebration. We had passed out Christmas shoeboxes and blanket and food baskets to many people the night before. We now hooked up a large trailer full of similar items to take to a small community named Potato Creek. I had heard of the community in a book called "Black Elk Speaks" so I was excited to go. We pulled into the common area of the community and opened the trailer up. Children and adults alike came out to see what we were up to so starting to give out gifts was no problem. We would ask the kids what they wanted for Christmas and they all answered with usual kid answers. "An X-Box" or "a bicycle or a basketball" or some such. There was this one kid that kinda lurked around the edge watching. Finally he approached the trailer. He was somewhat of an "unkept" kid. His hair was the kind of matted that did not happen over the course of one night, it had been quite a while since its last combing. It was long and looked like the unwilling victim of an at-home haircut. He was the kind of dirty that does happen from missing last night's bath. His clothes matched the rest of his appearance having not seen a washing of any kind in many days. It was 11 degrees, not counting the constant wind, and he had on a T-shirt with a hoodie over it. This kid's body quaked from the cold.

When he got to the trailer someone asked what he wanted for Christmas. "A coat". We stood stunned, staring at each other and looking helplessly into a trailer that we knew did not have a coat in it. We found him a pair of warm boots and he seemed grateful for them. Through conversation with a resident we discovered his father was "gone" and his mother was "a drunk". He was 8 years old and virtually on his own. My heart was breaking for this kid. I wanted to just cry. But here is where my life changed. As we stood talking about not having a coat with us for this kid, an 8 year old with the team from Oklahoma walked up and was eavesdropping. He suddenly interrupted all of us important adults by blurting out "He can have my coat". All of us important, educated, theologically trained adults just stood and looked at him with our mouths open until he obviously felt uncomfortable for us. "No, really, he can have mine. My dad will get me another one."

I can't really say that I was out right rebellious that day. Much to my crushing shame, I have to admit I never even thought of giving that kid my coat. It is not like the Holy Spirit prompted me and I refused. I was so steeped up in my religious piety that it never even crossed my mind to sacrifice something of my own to meet this poor child's pressing need. Then to have the simple faith to say "my dad will get me another one" made me realize how little confidence I had in my own Father. I stood and openly cried as I watched an eight year old and his mother from Oklahoma walk over to this Lakota kid and literally give him the coat off his back.

I stood there for I don't know how long just soaking in the moment. I knew my plastic make-believe life of self-indulgence had just been thrown under the bus of Christ-like love and was left shattered on the road to Potato Creek. I did not know what would be different, but I knew I could not play the game anymore. My obsession to own things, to give but never to the point it actually cost me anything of significance, certainly not any of "my" stuff, my greed and self-worship were all standing in the Light with nowhere to hide. I had been called out by two 8 year olds, one of whom obviously knew Jesus far better than I did. I still do not know all the ways this journey is going to manifest itself. I sincerely want nothing but to know Jesus. I don't know what is going to happen in my future. Right now I am grateful for the grace of God that sent me an 8 year old teacher to show me that I could never be the same from that moment on. ~ Joe Mullins, Tennessee

*When the team returned that day to the Dream Center from Potato Creek and we heard the story we praised the Lord for this little boy who had come with his mom and dad from Oklahoma to serve. Please pray for our Native Youth who are suffering and need us to continue on and never give up on their behalf. As we march on ....go with us to bring HOPE! Love you all ~Gary and Lori*

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