Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung: A “Good New Home” for American Indian Youth

The lack of affordable housing continues to affect Minnesotans across the state. To address this issue, Senator Tina Smith is reaching out to communities in Minnesota through statewide housing listening sessions entitled “How Does Minnesota’s Housing Crisis Impact Your Community?” Her staff held a listening session at the Minneapolis American Indian Center in November to learn more about the issues affecting American Indians living in urban areas. Senator Smith indicated that “when addressing homelessness, it is important to understand that in Minnesota, African American, Native, and LGBTQ+ youth are much more likely to experience homelessness than their peers who are white or straight. We need to pay special attention to communities impacted by historic housing discrimination and systemic inequities in our society, which is why I held special listening sessions to address issues among Native communities and communities of color.”

Senator Smith also noted the importance of working with the communities impacted by housing. “Solutions to the affordable housing crisis and housing insecurity need to work for communities that are impacted the most. I believe that the only way the federal government can be a good partner is by working with local leaders who understand best what will make a difference.”

As Senator Smith indicated, housing for American Indian youth presents its own unique challenges, including identifying youth and providing culturally appropriate services. According to Angela Gauthier, Associate Director of Ain Dah Yung Center (ADYC), “we know that when Native youth are showing up at other programs, they’re not always identifying themselves as Native. They’re not always staying because services aren’t culturally appropriate.”

A Vision for Culturally Specific Housing for American Indian Youth

Deb Foster has envisioned a housing project to meet the specific needs of American Indian young adults since she became Executive Director of the Ain Dah Yung Center ten years ago. “The Ain Dah Yung Center has a long, strong history of providing culturally responsive services to our communities. It started with providing shelter to our homeless young ones trying to stay in school, to providing advocacy support to the families of these children, added transitional housing for our older youth and street outreach, helped spearhead ICWA legal court compliance and services, and offering children’s mental health support and prevention programming, all within spaces where our youth and families can heal and re-establish the strengths of their cultural identity.”
Foster goes on to say, “early on we were witnessing our 18-year-olds aging out of foster care, losing all their benefits and who have exhausted their temporary housing option, falling right back into homelessness. This is a huge service gap within the homeless youth arena, particularly for our Native youth. We decided then, about 8 years ago, that it was time to establish a culturally relevant permanent supportive housing option that would combat the highest disparity of youth homelessness in MN.”

Turning the vision into reality had its challenges. “This was a huge undertaking,” Gauthier remarked. “Housing was a new endeavor for ADYC, and this was a huge learning. But the part of this that we know well is how to work with Native youth.”

Ensuring that American Indian homeless youth have access to their culture is vital to their healing. According to Gauthier, “Native youth can be an invisible population to service providers outside of the Native community. Because of the continued systemic racism and lack of awareness about the Native community, culture and traditions, and the lasting effects of trauma due to genocide, these youth are not identifying themselves as Native, not showing up to, or staying at, non-Native programs. ADYC knows that having access to your culture, traditions, and your identity is important in healing the community and individuals. But if you’ve never had access to this you may not know the power and healing that can come from having it.”

Building a Vision

The creation of Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung relied heavily on the unique cultural needs of American Indian youth and the influence from the community was evident throughout the building process. Many community members, including elders and youth, shared in the planning of the building and the programs that are offered. Their input also influenced the location of the building, which is on the Green Line light rail and rapid transit bus lines and close to educational opportunities. The building was designed by First Nations Design Studio of DSGW and constructed by Loeffler Construction, woman and Native owned.

According to Foster, “it was important to us that this building, these apartments, the location, services, everything be led by the youth who were homeless or have experienced homelessness. We also knew from the beginning that we needed people to rally around this effort, to understand that this is not just another housing project, but the answer to ensuring our Native homeless youth have every aspect of what they need to successfully leave the streets and achieve their individualized ambitions. We hosted many community talking circles from within the Native communities to legislators, state, county and federal partners, to our own governments - our Tribes.”

Foster lit up as she began talking about a very special individual, “we were so honored to have Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe leader – Herb Sam – join us on this venture. He wrapped his heart around this initiative early on and connected us to many people at Mille Lacs who are now partners with us and Mino Oski. He facilitated the land and space ceremony when the land was purchased, he took time to talk with our youth and then named the building – Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung (Good New Home – Ojibwe) and provided the final ground blessing ceremony before breaking ground. I will forever hold in my heart when he leaned over and said at the ground blessing, ‘I was going to be here no matter what.’ I soon after found out that he had just discovered that he had cancer and passed on to the spirit world about a month later. We have a portrait of Herb in our Gidagaybinesh Gallery, which is named after him, where he will forever be dearly remembered.”
“We are also extremely grateful to the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community for their $700,000 contribution to the capital campaign and for sponsoring units. So much of the culturally responsiveness of this building and services, which are imperative to the success of our youth people, was made possible by the SMSC.”

Services Available at Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung

The building was designed to allow youth to participate in and learn more about their American Indian cultures. The cultural activities center is equipped with supplies to make regalia and to bead, has space to work with hides to make drums, and is designed to host darkroom ceremonies. Each residential floor has circular cultural gathering spaces for smaller group teachings. A medicine garden and sweat lodge will be added in the spring. Community drum and dance groups are also hosted in the cultural community room.

The Ninijanisag (Our Children) Program, which provides cultural services to the residents and community youth, is now located at Mino Oski. The program includes groups focused on tobacco and chemical use prevention, along with suicide prevention. A cultural specialist is also available to support residents’ cultural needs.

In addition to the cultural services and activities provided at Mino Oski, Transition Coaches assist residents with meeting their personal and professional goals. The Transition Coaches complete the initial assessments for determining move-in eligibility and help youth navigate the process with Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung’s property management partner and co-owner – Project for Pride in Living. Once youth are moved in, they work individually with those who are interested in services to help them make progress on their goal plans. Additional classes and groups, such as financial literacy, job training, and life skills will also be offered. A Youth and Family Therapist is available to residents to address their mental health needs.

Other services include a new outreach and case manager position funded through a Pohlad grant, in collaboration with Lutheran Social Services and StreetWorks. Mino Oski is also looking to add new services to their continuum of care, such as newly secured funding for a safe harbor advocate that will provide case management for youth that are at risk of or have experienced sexual exploitation.

Welcome Home!

Youth began moving into the building in November 2019 and it is anticipated that the 42-unit building will reach capacity by early February 2020. Hennepin County Extended Foster Care Social Worker Jill Mehrkens learned about Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung through a meeting with the St. Paul Public School District Office. She coordinated the intake process for her client with Transition Coach Tierre Thompson. “He was amazing in coordinating this process for my youth. He was youth friendly and made my youth feel very comfortable from the start. They had to receive the verifications for my youth and get the approval through their compliance department. After verifications were received it was a smooth process as I coordinated with Tierre how the security deposit would be paid and the amount of rent my youth was responsible for.” Mehrkens’ client moved into Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung in mid-December.
Of this experience, Merhkens said, “I feel that it takes a village to work with our youth in Extended Foster Care. They have gone through significant trauma and are very distrusting of the system, so having a community agency not affiliated with the county is a tremendous support.”

Mehrkens believes Mino Osiki will make a difference for young adults in the extended foster care system. “So many of our youth have significant barriers they have to overcome to obtain stable housing. Housing is the number one barrier for those leaving extended foster care to be successful and ADYC was able to allow my youth to thrive and not just survive.”

Mino Osiki’s Impact

Gauthier expressed her hopes for Mino Osiki Ain Dah Yung and noted that, “in the 11 years or so that I have been at the Ain Dah Yung Center, a very powerful aspect for me is the longevity in relationships that we have. Former youth come back as adults to be employees or refer family members to our programming. ADYC has been the place where some current and former youth celebrate significant life achievements – their graduation parties, their baby showers, their children’s first birthdays, this is the place that it happens. For that reason, the Ain Dah Yung Center is more than a place to stay or more than an institutional place. So I think that Mino Osiki is hopefully another extension of that and a place where youth can come and be for a year, 5 years, whatever they need to stabilize and to really feel like they have a home for the first time, and a home in their community, and that all their needs are being met.”

While the short-term benefits are evident, Foster is excited for its future impact. “We know that Mino Osiki Ain Dah Yung has everything our homeless youth need to garner the healing, cultural experiences, and skills necessary to be successful because it was Native informed, Native designed and will continue to be Native led. However, our communities need so many more of these culturally responsive housing initiatives throughout Minnesota and the country. If Mino Osiki can be one model project, if we can continue to support other Tribes, agencies, communities in creating more spaces that help our people regain and fortify the beauty of our traditions and culture where true achievement happens…then we will have accomplished one of our goals for many years to come.”

Senator Smith also noted the lasting impact of Mino Osiki Ain Dah Yung. “It is my hope that we continue to see an increased investment in homeless assistance and supportive services for Native communities. This project will play a vital role in connecting youth with necessary services like health care and educational opportunities, while also uplifting their cultural identity. We’ve seen from health care to education and nutrition that when Native youth connect with their culture and traditional practices it helps ensure young people build a strong foundation to live healthy lives.”

Mino Osiki Ain Dah Yung Grand Opening

The Ain Dah Yung Center celebrated the grand opening of Mino Osiki Ain Dah Yung on November 20th, 2019. Over 200 people celebrated the grand opening, including tribal, state, and local officials. Attendees toured the new building and learned about the building process and the new services available for the youth who will live there. The event included a ribbon cutting, acknowledgement of contributors, unveiling of the Herb Sam memorial portrait, and concluded with a round dance. Chi Miigwetch to the community for making this an amazing experience!
**Court’s Duty of Continued Inquiry**

The Minnesota Judicial Branch recently released updated Rules of Juvenile Protection Procedure which includes a section specifically dedicated to proceedings governed by the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Among the updated rules related to ICWA is the court’s duty of continued inquiry regarding whether the child is an Indian child. This rule is important to ensure that there is a thorough inquiry regarding a child’s potential tribal affiliations to avoid proceeding with the case without properly applying ICWA. While the court is already responsible for inquiring about American Indian ancestry and heritage at the initial hearing, a continued inquiry can provide additional information about whether ICWA applies, especially from parties or participants who did not attend the initial hearing.

**Rule 29.02. Court’s Duty of Continued Inquiry**

*Unless the court has made a finding that the child is an Indian child, the court shall at all stages in the proceedings, continue to inquire whether the child has Indian ancestry or heritage. If, at any time during the proceedings, the court has reason to believe that the child has Indian ancestry or heritage, the court shall direct the petitioner to continue to investigate whether the child is an Indian child.*

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**Successful Meet and Greet**

The Family Preservation Subcommittee of the Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors (MUID) hosted a Meet and Greet on November 18th, 2019, at the Minneapolis American Indian Center. Metro area county human services, nonprofit agencies, tribal representatives, judges, attorneys, Guardians ad Litem and court staff were invited to attend this event to learn more about community services and meet those working in American Indian child welfare. American Indian organizations also had the opportunity to introduce themselves and talk more about the work that they do. Thank you to everyone who attended!

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**Court Updates**

The ADYC Compliance Newsletter includes positive observations from ICWA hearings as well as ICWA highlights that demonstrate the great work happening in Ramsey County.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Judge</th>
<th>Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/24/19</td>
<td>Hilgers</td>
<td>After asking the mother for permission, Judge Hilgers instructed her law clerk to take the mother's two children to the waiting area to color during the hearing so the mother could focus on the hearing. The mother stated she is grateful for all the services that have been provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/7/19</td>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>The mother and child were successfully reunified. Judge Nelson reminded them to utilize the new tools in their toolbox of resources and to reach out when times get tough even though the court is no longer a part of their lives. She commended the family on their bright future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/8/19</td>
<td>Warner</td>
<td>At a post-permanency review hearing Judge Warner noted that despite the issues regarding communication that came up during the hearing she was pleased with the parties’ desire to do what is best for the youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/21/19</td>
<td>Hilgers</td>
<td>The child protection petition was withdrawn. The mother thanked everyone for helping her do what she needed to do to show she is sufficient and a great mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/25/19</td>
<td>Street</td>
<td>Referee Street commended Social Worker Crystal Hedemann and Leech Lake Social Worker Patricia Lafontaine for the tremendous active efforts they made prior to the case coming into court, including working with hospital staff, parents, and extended family to care for the child.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ICWA Violations
The ADYC Compliance Newsletter includes ICWA violations which may be from hearings held at court and/or from case files. We are blessed to have such a close working relationship with Ramsey County folks and the judges who preside for our families. We are pleased to report that there were no violations observed during Quarter 4! We look forward to our continued partnership as we work together to find ways for our families to be successful!

Tribal Attendance
The following chart indicates the tribes involved in ICWA cases in Ramsey County. The chart includes the tribes involved, the number of hearings that occurred, and the number of times the tribe attended hearings. This data reflects hearings the court monitor attended and does not include all Ramsey County ICWA cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRIBE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF HEARINGS</th>
<th>TRIBE PRESENT</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blackfeet Nation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bois Forte Band of Chippewa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheyenne River Sioux</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho-Chunk Nation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Sioux Indian Community</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cheyenne Tribe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omaha Tribe of Nebraska</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prairie Island Indian Community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Lake Nation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosebud Sioux Tribe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Lake Tribe</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Earth Nation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown*</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*There was little or no indication in the paperwork or discussion in the courtroom to determine eligibility for specific tribes.
About the Quarter 4 Data

Data was collected from October 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019. This data is collected by the court monitor at hearings held at court, talking to the parties involved, and reading case files. This data reflects hearings the court monitor attended and does not include all Ramsey County ICWA cases.

Active Efforts

While a finding of active efforts is not always made orally on the record, it is often included in the written record.

One finding of active efforts was delayed for two weeks pending more information from the social worker regarding specific active efforts.

There were 5 disputes regarding the finding of active efforts. These disputes were from the mother (2), tribe (2), and father (1).

In 9 hearings that took place after permanency had been ordered, judges found that active efforts to finalize the permanency plan or an adoption had been made.

Court Time

This data reflects only ICWA cases. Hearings are typically called at least 30 minutes after the calendar starts, giving families time to meet with social workers, attorneys, and Guardians ad Litem before their hearings.

Overall, wait times in Q4 2019 tended to be shorter than wait times in Q4 2018 as the court continues to address the issue of long wait times.

The complexity of ICWA cases, such as tribal involvement and discussion regarding active efforts, impacts hearing lengths. The court does a great job ensuring that these issues are addressed in hearings, which can increase hearing lengths.
Visitation

Maintaining consistent visitation and the relationship between parent and child is extremely important in reaching reunification. Liberal visitation plans are common, enabling the parent to visit their child as their schedule allows.

Barriers to visitation often included parents’ work schedules and lack of transportation. In many cases the agency offered transportation or worked with foster parents to arrange transportation.

Over half of visits were supervised, most often by relative foster parents. Supervision by relatives can help create a more relaxed and natural visit.

Some parents utilized multiple forms of supervision to increase their visitation time each week.

A requirement of active efforts is that visitation should occur in the most natural setting possible, including non-institutional settings. Most visits occurred in homes, which meets this requirement.

Institutional settings include visitation agencies and parents’ treatment facilities. Visitation in these cases might not be possible outside of these institutional settings, so these options benefit parents and children.

In some cases, visitation agencies were the parent’s preference since it fit best with their schedules and allowed them the most visits possible.

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Ain Dah Yung Center’s 22nd Annual
Cherish the Children
Traditional Pow Wow

Central High School, 275 Lexington Ave. St. Paul, MN 55104

Feb. 8th & 9th 2020
Doors Open at 11:00 am
Registration at 11:00 am

Grand Entries:
Saturday 1:00 & 7:00 pm
Saturday Feast: 5:00 pm
Sunday 1:00 pm

Emcees:
Jerry Dearly
Reuben Crowfeather

All Kinds of FUN!
50/50 Drawings!

Incredible Door Prizes throughout the weekend!

American Indian Craft Vendors!

Host Drum:
Little Earth

Invited Drum:
Oyate Teca

Head Dancers:
Joe Artishon
Miiskogihmiiwan Pouparl-Chapman

Only the first 10 registered drums with a minimum of 5 singers will receive an honorarium.

SPECIALS!!
♦ Team Dance Special - 1st, 2nd, 3rd
♦ 2 Step Special
♦ Girls 17 and under—1st, 2nd, 3rd
♦ Boys 17 and under—1st, 2nd, 3rd

$5 Entry fee for ages 7+ Free entry for Elders & Veterans
Donations for Entrance No Longer Accepted

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