



## The Lakota Waldorf School

### An Update on Our Indigenous Waldorf Mission

By Isabel Stadnick (LWS Co-Founder & School Administrator) and Caroline Stadnick (LWS Counselor & Resource Teacher)

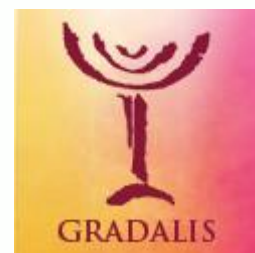
*Note:* On October 12, 2020, Waldorf Today honored Indigenous Peoples Day by "reprinting" a 2012 article introducing the Lakota Waldorf School (LWS). Today, we are pleased to share a new article by Isabel Stadnick and her daughter, Caroline, which gives an inspiring update and inside view on the school's indigenous Waldorf mission.



*Photo: Grand Entry at the 2019 LWS Pow Wow Celebrating Waldorf 100*

Waldorf education builds upon a comprehensive pedagogy and a flexible curriculum that allows each school a unique identity, one that reflects the local culture and community it serves. Lakota Waldorf School (LWS) – the only Waldorf School in North American located on an Indian Reservation – exemplifies this truth.

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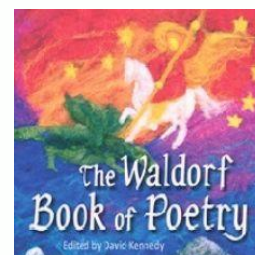
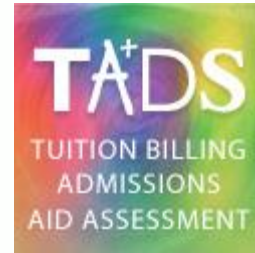
Located in the Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota, one of the most impoverished Indian reservations in the United States, the LWS was founded as a tuition-free school in 1993 by families from the Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribe. Their goal was to provide a school for their children that would strengthen their cultural identity, to increase their Lakota language fluency, and to help them develop the academic, social, and practical skills needed to meet the challenges faced by native peoples in today's world.

To this end, Waldorf Education, based on its intrinsic alignment with basic indigenous teaching practices, was chosen as the pedagogical foundation for the school. And from here, our indigenous Waldorf mission began to unfold in the form of a Waldorf Education integrated with a Lakota language and culture program for children living in the Pine Ridge Reservation.

We know it is impossible in this article to share all the struggles and joys of our growth from an early childhood school into one that now serves Grades K-8. However, we believe these three parts in the story will give a fuller picture of our indigenous Waldorf school:

1. Our Lakota Language and Culture Program
2. The Academy for Indigenous Waldorf Pedagogy (LWS's Teacher Training Program)
3. LWS's Master Plan for Campus Expansion

## 1. The LWS Lakota Language & Culture Program





Sitting at the heart of our indigenous Waldorf mission is the Lakota Language and Culture program. It lives in our Waldorf curriculum by engaging students in Lakota stories, native sports (like archery), and native arts and crafts such as beadwork, loom work, flute playing, and more. It is also seen in the school's daily rhythm of smudging with sage, praying in Lakota, feeding the ancestors (putting a little plate outside in honor of those who live in the spirit world), and the recitation and singing of traditional songs. Students also connect with their ancestors' rich cultural traditions through seasonal pow wows and other activities that honor the rhythms of nature.

Most importantly, however, the program focuses on teaching the Lakota language – a dialect of Sioux that is classified by UNESCO as vulnerable to extinction. Teaching Lakota is significant because the Lakota language, like all languages, embodies our people's culture and spirit.

In the fall of 2020, the LWS received its first federal grant for "Native American Language Maintenance and Preservation" from the Administration for Native Americans (ANA). With this Federal grant and a second grant from the First Nations Development Institute the Lakota Language and Culture Program expanded with a "gardening, native plants, and food" component, which taught Lakota language and culture to students as they engaged in practical work, such as gardening, food preparation, while learning about traditional Lakota native plants, food self-

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sufficiency, and ecology.

- We have hired a second Lakota Language teacher, as well as several Lakota language mentors. Mentors visit students at home to support their language studies during COVID-19. Also, LWS teachers and staff now have their own Lakota language classes.
- A new performing arts component was added to the program that includes a new outdoor classroom/stage area for instructional and cultural activities during this time of COVID-19 social distancing requirements.

LWS is deeply grateful for all the donors that make our Lakota Language and Culture Program and school possible. Located in one of the country's poorest counties, LWS does not receive income from tuition. Therefore, we greatly rely on grants (75%) and gifts from individuals (25%) to support our annual budget.

## 2. The Academy for Indigenous Waldorf Pedagogy (LWS's Teacher Training Program)



Currently, six of our eight teachers at LWS are Lakota tribal members. Since our beginning, LWS has sought to hire tribal members and train them in Waldorf pedagogy. However, our efforts to send teachers to Waldorf training have encountered many obstacles. Waldorf teacher training is expensive, and our funding was insufficient. We concluded that in-house Waldorf training is the best approach to weave together Waldorf pedagogy with Lakota culture.

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## Forwarding the newsletter



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Therefore, after much exploration and research, we established our own teacher training, the Academy for Indigenous Waldorf Pedagogy (AIWP). Launched in summer 2019, the training includes a guided, practice-based, and culturally inclusive curriculum for the teachers with weekly seminars conducted at the LWS. Our long-term vision is to provide indigenous Waldorf training to teachers at other native schools across the country.

AIWP was developed by Celestine Stadnick in collaboration with the Academy for Anthroposophical Pedagogy (AfaP) – the Waldorf teacher training institute based in Dornach, Switzerland. The training, which spans over eight semesters, includes five main courses, each taking place over a 16-week semester. Celestine's work has also produced an AIWP concept and regulation guide and a partnership with AfaP representatives Dr. Thomas Stöckli, Gerwin Mader (the directors of the teacher training center in Dornach), and Dieter Schaffner, also a co-worker of the institute in Dornach, who is giving courses in the Academy of the LWS.

Celestine Stadnick served as a LWS Waldorf teacher from 2017 to 2020. In August 2020, she began her master's in educational administration and leadership at the University of New Brunswick in Canada. Therefore, the leadership of AIWP transitioned from Celestine Stadnick to Caroline Stadnick. Both Celestine and Caroline are Waldorf teachers who did their training at the AfaP in Dornach. Caroline has also completed a Master of Education in Exceptional Learners. Born on the Pine Ridge Reservation, Celestine and Caroline are sisters and members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe.

Currently, the LWS has five students enrolled in AIWP; two are expected to graduate in 2022, the other three in 2023. Without a doubt, the program provides a practical answer to our need for indigenous Waldorf teacher training. And because Lakota people are very spiritual people, AIWP has had a fructifying effect. Through the training, our teachers' intuitive connection with the spiritual aspect of Waldorf pedagogy is evolving into a more conscious teaching process. Also, LWS teachers and office staff now meet in a circle each weekday at 8:00 am for a soul calendar reading followed by a Lakota prayer song. LWS continues to unfold as a beautiful example of how Lakota culture and Waldorf pedagogy can live and enrich each other.

### 3. LWS's Master Plan for Campus

## Expansion



No doubt, our story of becoming a K-8th Grade elementary school would not be complete without the LWS Campus Master Plan and the \$2,154,530 Campaign for Campus Expansion that will make it possible. Launched in 2017, the campaign is working to provide LWS with a permanent energy-efficient home – one with an enriching learning environment that supports the school’s educational and cultural goals.

To date, we have raised \$922,830, which has allowed us to complete the construction of the west wing of the school with four large light-filled classrooms for combined grade levels. And we are now beginning to fundraise for \$1,231,700 to enlarge our currently crowded facilities. This phase includes a much-needed commercial-grade kitchen, faculty and administrative workspace, a student cafeteria room that connects with a multi-purpose assembly hall, a community café with a retail area, and much more.

To learn more about our campaign, download our campaign booklet from [lakotawaldorfschool.org/campus-expansion/](http://lakotawaldorfschool.org/campus-expansion/).

For a more in-depth look at our school, visit our improved website at [lakotawaldorfschool.org](http://lakotawaldorfschool.org).

And to stay up-to-date with our news, sign up for LWS e-newsletters at [lakotawaldorfschool.org/newsletter/](http://lakotawaldorfschool.org/newsletter/).

Canje etaŋ wopila taŋka uŋnic’upi.

(We thank you greatly from our hearts.)

We are deeply grateful and inspired by many Waldorf community members worldwide that have shown their interest, encouragement, and support.

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