

# INDIAN COUNTRY PROGRAM OVERVIEW

FRIENDS of the CHILDREN

## WHO WE ARE

Friends of the Children is a national nonprofit that is impacting generational change by providing children and families the opportunity to forge a path that would meet their ancestors' wildest dreams. We do this by providing children facing the greatest obstacles with a long-term, paid professional mentor, called a Friend, from pre-kindergarten through high school graduation - 12+ years, no matter what.



## WHERE WE WORK

Friends of the Children serves children and families in 37 sites across the country in rural and urban areas, with 29 of these sites impacting Indigenous youth and families. Friends of the Children opened Friends – He Sapa in 2022, two Indigenous-led sites working directly with the Lakota *Oyate* [people] in Rapid City, South Dakota and the Oglala Lakota Nation site located on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

## OUR STORY

Our model was founded on research showing that the single most important factor in overcoming childhood adversity is a long-term, nurturing relationship with a consistent, caring adult. This is something Indigenous peoples have always known, and it is reflected in tribal concepts of kinship and community. Friends of the Children began with three salaried mentors serving 24 children in Portland, Oregon. Today, Friends of the Children reaches thousands of children across the nation. We look to deepen relationships in Indian Country to ensure that Indigenous youth and families benefit from our professional mentoring model.

## THE CHILDREN WE SERVE

Like all children, the youth we serve have unique talents and big dreams. They also face more obstacles than others including: systemic poverty, structural racism, childhood trauma, underfunded schools, violence, hunger, and homelessness. We meet children between the ages of 4-6 and walk alongside them and their caregivers for 12+ years—from pre-kindergarten through graduation and entry to post-secondary education and the workforce.



## OUR FRIENDS

Friends are full-time, salaried professionals who spend 3-4 hours each week with each child. Our mentors teach valuable life skills, model healthy behaviors, and create pathways to more choices and opportunities for youth all while utilizing Indigenous culture lifeways to enhance the Friends of the Children model.

# THE MODEL

The Friends of the Children model work ensures that youth are supported from as early as age 4 through high school graduation. Friends of the Children is committed working in partnership with sovereign tribal nations. Our intention is to ground our work in tribal cultures specific to the communities we serve utilizing an extended kinship model incorporating naming ceremonies, coming of age ceremonies, culture camps and other cultural interventions as a means to strengthen identity among Indigenous youth. In our unique model:

- We invite youth and caregivers to join us
- We hire and train full-time, paid, professional mentors
- We commit for the long-term
- Our work is relationship-based, individualized, and intentional
- We work with youth and caregivers in the community, at-home, and at-school
- We evaluate, measure, and improve

In the tribal culturally specific sites we work within an Indigenous world view that recognizes youth as our most sacred resource. Friends of The Children seeks to become a part of the community who are dedicated to empower and protect them. The canoe journey parallels our work in the Pacific Northwest. We seek to place the child at the center of the canoe with a Friend helping to guide their journey. Our 2-Gen approach also places the family in the canoe, allowing everyone to “paddle” in unison, coordinating efforts along the journey. Ultimately, we want to strengthen and empower the youth to be like our Salmon relatives, giving them the ability to swim upstream against life’s inevitable challenges to ensure the continuation of their tribal nations into the future.



*My strength is from the fish; my blood is from the fish, from the roots and berries. The fish and game are the essence of my life. I was not brought from a foreign country and did not come here. I was put here by the Creator*  
- Chief Meninock, Yakama, 1915

## IT WORKS



83% of youth graduate high school

Although 50% have parents who did not have the support necessary to graduate



93% avoid the juvenile justice system

Although 60% have parents who have been impacted by the criminal justice system



98% avoid early parenting

Although 85% have parents who started parenting during their teens.



92% enroll in post-secondary education, serve our country, or enter the workforce

Invest in the Community

**\$1 = \$7**

For every \$1 invested in Friends of the Children, the community benefits over \$7 in saved social costs. Helping one child saves the community \$900,000.

## LEARN MORE



For information about Friends of the Children's work in Indian Country, please contact Chief Officer of Advancement and Tribal Relations Tasha Mousseau at [tmousseau@friendsofthechildren.org](mailto:tmousseau@friendsofthechildren.org)



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