

FRIENDS OF THE CHILDREN-HE SAPA

Summer 2026

NEWSLETTER

Friends in the Field

This summer, we launched our first formal Summer Literacy Program, made possible through support from a Rotary Global Grant. This program is designed to help our youth build strong reading skills in a fun, supportive, and culturally grounded environment. Our mentors worked closely with each child to strengthen their confidence and ability in literacy.

At Friends of the Children-He Sapa, we believe that literacy is a powerful tool for decolonization and a pathway to breaking cycles of generational poverty. When youth are strong readers, they are better equipped to navigate systems, advocate for themselves, and create the futures they deserve.

For our communities, literacy is about reclaiming knowledge, strengthening identity, and creating opportunities for future generations



Pictured: Program youth participating in the Summer Literacy Program

Words of Woksape

Culture isn't what we do, it's the heart of who we are

The Lakota way of life guides us in achieving our mission at Friends of the Children – He Sapa. Using these values as a basis for decision-making can pave the way in which we live our lives providing balance and meaning. Enjoy our most recent installment of our Traditional Teachings online series from respected Elder Richard Two dogs “Interpreter of the Sacred”. Find these teachings and more on our [official Youtube Channel!](#)

The Results...

Summer Literacy Focus

This program is part of our larger commitment to ensuring that our youth do not simply graduate high school or earn a GED—we want them to become exemplary scholars, leaders, and lifelong learners.



Throughout June and July, our youth engaged in reading, writing, observation, storytelling, and hands-on discovery in a culturally responsive learning environment designed to nurture curiosity, confidence, and a love of learning. We intentionally created spaces where our children can strengthen academic skills while remaining deeply connected to their culture, community, and sense of belonging.

During Literacy Camp, a total of 120 reading fluency assessments were administered. A baseline was developed for each student at the beginning of camp to assess strengths and needs. Instruction was built around these assessments and the following data can be celebrated: 57% of students demonstrated a growth in the area of reading fluency. IN this area of growth, 19% of students increased reading fluency by one full grade level.

Students earned marbles for demonstrating the Lakota values (Respect, Comapssion, Fortitude, Perseverance, Wisdom, Bravery, and gratitude) During literacy camp, students demonstrated over 1,100 values and earned two class parties.

FRIENDS OF THE CHILDREN-HE SAPA

Guided by Dedicated Community Leaders



Terri Sorensen
Friends of the
Children National



Ruth Cedar Face
Little Wound School



Mike Carlow Jr.
Pine Ridge School



Whitnee Coy Ed.D
Oglala Lakota
College



Jade Herman Ed.D
Board President

At Friends of the Children–He Sapa, our board members generously volunteer their time, expertise, and leadership to provide strategic guidance, strengthen community partnerships, and uphold our mission of impacting generational change through long-term relationships with professional mentors. They represent a wide range of professional backgrounds, but share a common belief: that every wakhǎnyeža (child) deserves to be seen, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential.

From lifelong educators and advocates for Indigenous communities to leaders in public service, business, and organizational development, each board member contributes unique perspectives that help shape the future of our chapter. Their collective experience in governance, community engagement, youth development, organizational leadership, and relationship-building ensures that Friends of the Children–He Sapa remains rooted in our values while growing to meet the needs of the children and families we serve.

We are deeply grateful for the passion, wisdom, and servant leadership of our Board of Directors. Their commitment extends far beyond board meetings, they are ambassadors for our mission, champions for Indigenous youth, and partners in building stronger families and healthier communities across He Sapa.

Together, they help ensure that every decision we make is guided by our promise to stand beside our youth for 12+ years, no matter what.

Behind the Scenes

We have moved office locations! We are excited to announce that our new location is at 330 Knollwood Dr, Rapid City, SD 57701. If you are in the neighborhood stop on by and stay for a cup of coffee.

Did you know?

THE ROLE OF A FRIEND

There are many ways to be a good Friend, though there are common themes across Friends and across Friends of the Children chapters. Friends develop caring, trusting, and sustained relationships by spending time with their children one-on-one. Friends expose youth to a broad spectrum of experiences in an effort to develop new interests and skills.

Friends encourage learning and the development of each child's basic life skills. Friend relationships with youth are the essential building blocks in all aspects of the Friends of the Children Program.

Never miss a moment

We revamped our social media presence! Follow like and share each of our pages, a little support goes a long way in supporting this work

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsHeSapa/> Instagram: @friendshesapa X (Formerly known as Twitter): @FOTCHesapa

Partner Highlight

United Way of the Black Hills



We are honored to be a recipient of the Innovation Grant through Black Hills Reads. Stay tuned for our exciting project!