



FR1ENDS of the
CH1LDREN
He Sapa

1
—
1

IMPACT
REPORT

2026

One Child. One Friend. 12+ years, no matter what.

A LETTER

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

Dear Relatives, Friends, and Supporters:

In Lakota culture, we are taught that children are sacred. They carry our stories, our hopes, our languages, and our future. The way we care for our children today shapes the world that the next seven generations will inherit.

Since our founding in 2022, Friends of the Children–He Sapa has been rooted in a simple but transformative belief: every child deserves to know they belong, they are valued, and they have people who will walk beside them throughout life's journey. Through our model of long-term professional mentoring, we make a promise to each child and family we serve—12+ years, no matter what.

While this promise is backed by proven successful outcomes, it is also deeply aligned with Indigenous ways of being. Long before formal programs and systems existed, our communities understood that raising children was a collective responsibility. A child was never expected to navigate life alone. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, relatives, and community members all shared in the work of helping young people discover who they are meant to become.

At Friends of the Children–He Sapa, we carry those teachings forward.

Our professional mentors do more than provide support. They build relationships rooted in consistency, trust, compassion, and accountability. They celebrate accomplishments, help children overcome obstacles, strengthen connections to family and culture, and remind young people that they are worthy of love and belonging. In many ways, they help restore something our communities have always known: healing happens through relationships.

Over the past four years, we have witnessed the power of those relationships. We have seen children grow in confidence, families deepen their support networks, caregivers come together in community, and youth reconnect with cultural teachings that strengthen identity and resilience.



We have watched children discover their gifts, find their voices, and begin to imagine futures filled with possibility.

This work is especially important here in He Sapa (the Black Hills), a place that holds deep significance for Lakota people and many Indigenous Nations. We recognize that our children inherit both the strength of their ancestors and the impacts of historical and ongoing systems that were designed to separate families, cultures, and communities from one another. Our response is not rooted in deficit. It is rooted in abundance. We believe our children already possess the wisdom, strength, and potential to thrive. Our role is to walk alongside them as they uncover it.

We are continually inspired by the dedication of our mentors, caregivers, staff, volunteers, donors, and community partners. Together, we are helping build a future where Indigenous children are surrounded by opportunity, connected to culture, and supported by caring adults who believe in them without condition.

While this report celebrates the first chapter of our story, the most important work still lies ahead. The children from our first cohort are still growing, learning, and dreaming. We remain committed to keeping our promise to each of them and to every family that entrusts us with a place in their lives.

Pilamayaye (thank you) to everyone who has walked this journey with us. Your support helps ensure that our children know they are never alone and that their futures matter.

Together, we are investing not only in individual children, but in the strength of our families, our communities, and the generations yet to come.

With gratitude and hope,

Jade Herman
Jade Herman, Ed.D.
Board Chair

Tyresha Grey Horse
Tyresha Grey Horse
Executive Director

OUR HISTORY IN REVIEW

Inspired by the Lakota tradition of Winter Counts, each pictograph represents a defining moment in our chapter's history.



2022

Door Open Articles of Incorporation signed by original Board of Directors, breaking ground on the first culturally specific location of Friends of the Children.



2023

First cohort of youth enrollment and first hiring of Professional Mentors.



2026

Moved to new office location and hosted Grand Opening, welcoming the community into our Hocoka. Secured the Rotary Global Grant kicking off our commitment to literacy.



2024

Second cohort of youth enrolled; topping enrollment to 65. Footprint expands to include 19 schools throughout the service area that program youth attend.



2025

Focus on expanding public exposure of Friends of the Children mission; Walked in the Native American Day Parade in Rapid City, SD and interviewed with Good Morning KOTA territory.

OUR STORY

Friends of the Children–He Sapa opened in August 2022, as a site working directly with the Lakota Oyate [people] in Rapid City, South Dakota. Shortly thereafter, by way of a Tribal Resolution, the Oglala Lakota Nation invited the program to join the work on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, launching a second location for the chapter.

OUR MISSION

Impacting generational change by empowering youth who are facing the greatest obstacles through relationships with Professional Mentors, 12+ years, no matter what.

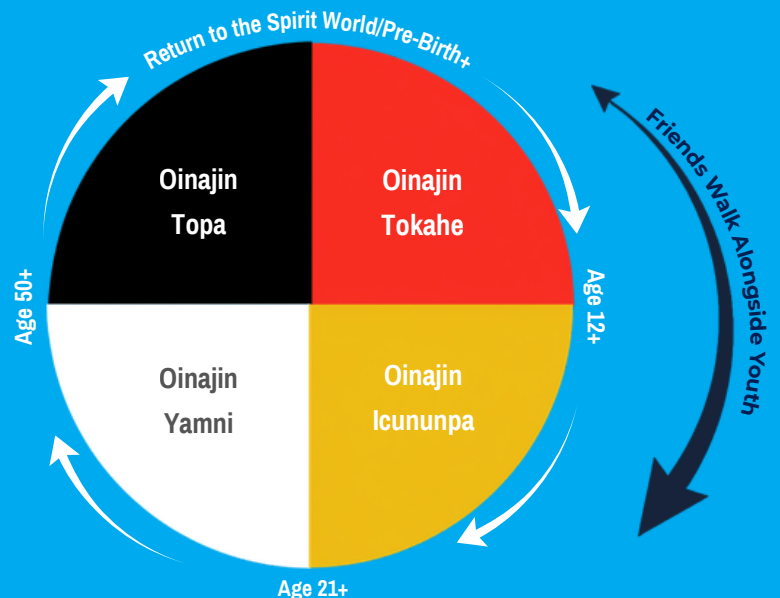
OUR MODEL

The Friends of the Children model ensures that youth are supported from as early as age 4 through high school graduation—nearly half of the Oinajin Topa (four stages of the Lakota Way of Life).

Friends of the Children is committed to grounding our work in Lakota culture using the extended kinship model through naming ceremonies, making of relatives, coming of age ceremonies, and healing camps.



FOUR STAGES OF THE LAKOTA WAY OF LIFE



OUR IMPACT IN 2026

Our time-tested, proven model focuses on the power of one-on-one, paid Professional Mentoring. This provides our youth with a trusted Mentor as they grow through each phase of their young lives toward adulthood. We also look beyond the youth to their families. Relatives develop trusting relationships with caregivers and elders, partnering to promote the child's learning and development.

520

individuals impacted by
**PROFESSIONAL
MENTORSHIP**



10,706

hours dedicated to youth
PROGRAM SUPPORT



531

hours mentors spent with
CAREGIVERS



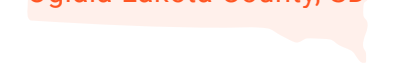
1,748

hours spent in
SCHOOLS



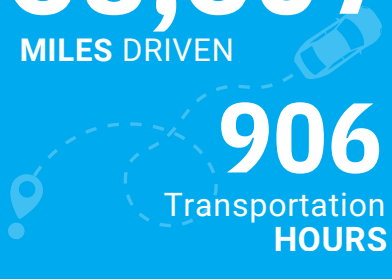
5,611

SQUARE MILES SERVED
across Pennington County
and
Oglala Lakota County, SD



38,507

MILES DRIVEN



906

Transportation
HOURS

5-10

AGE RANGE OF YOUTH

100%

eligible for
free or
reduced
lunch



368

hours spent on
**PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**



611

hours spent
**RESEARCHING AND
PLANNING**

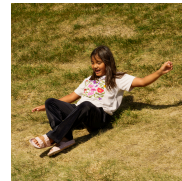


THE POWER OF SHOWING UP

H.T.'S STORY

Recently, HT* took a step toward confidence and pride in her cultural identity. She was paired with Hattie, a Relative, over a year and a half ago and has worked hard to develop her social-emotional skills. Hattie and HT often talk about dance, with Hattie encouraging her to pursue it. For Indigenous people, dance is considered medicine, a traditional way to worship, honor, and uplift ourselves and our communities. Though HT is shy and had strongly opposed dancing, that changed during her school's Indigenous Peoples' Month celebration. For the first time, HT danced in front of her classmates, wearing a ribbon skirt Hattie had hand-sewn for her. It was incredibly heartwarming for staff to see and demonstrated the power of Indigenous mentorship. HT's growing confidence and pride in her cultural identity show she is developing the skills that will support her educational goals through high school graduation.

*Name changed for confidentiality.



J.E.'S STORY

When Sharay joined our organization in June 2025, her youth were shy and struggled to open up to her. She began slowly, taking time to lay the foundation for relationships she will foster for years to come and showing the girls that she would be a consistent adult in their lives. As Sharay began setting goals with her Program Director, she looked for ways to use her own strengths. A star athlete in high school,

Sharay felt confident introducing basketball during her first outing with JE*. She wanted to choose something low-stress and engaging. To her surprise, JE was a natural! When Sharay asked if she had played before, JE shared that it was her first time and that she loved it. They continued playing for hours. The experience demonstrated the core asset Find Your Spark. By sharing one of her own strengths, Sharay helped JE discover a new interest that she can continue exploring and building upon.

*Name changed for confidentiality.

OUR LITERACY INITIATIVE

We are excited to launch 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 will work closely with each child to strengthen their confidence and literacy skills.

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.



OUR APPROACH: CULTURE & CONNECTION

Our literacy program is grounded in culturally responsive teaching



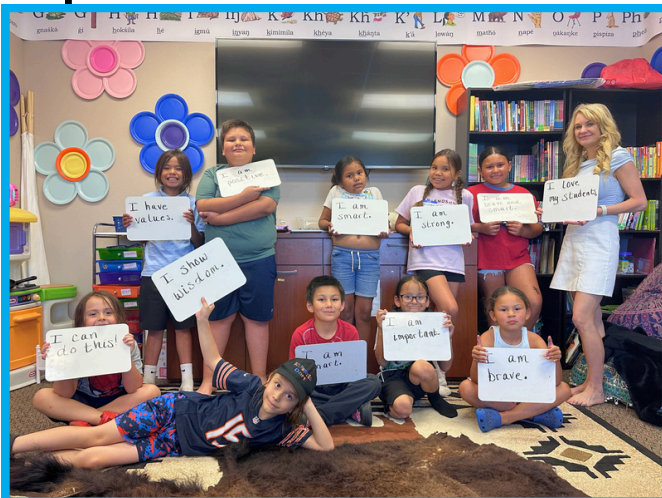
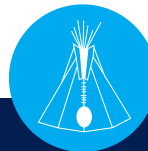
We honor each child's identity,
language, and lived experience



Mentors build strong, trusting relationships with youth



Learning is tailored to each child's individual needs



By affirming who our youth are, we create an environment where they feel confident, capable, and ready to learn.

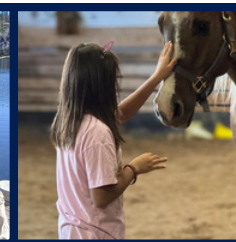
HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2026

From literacy and regalia-making to national recognition, the year brought new opportunities for youth and families to learn, connect and celebrate who they are.

Learning
skills that build
confidence



Creating
spaces where youth,
Relatives and caregivers
come together, learn,
and heal



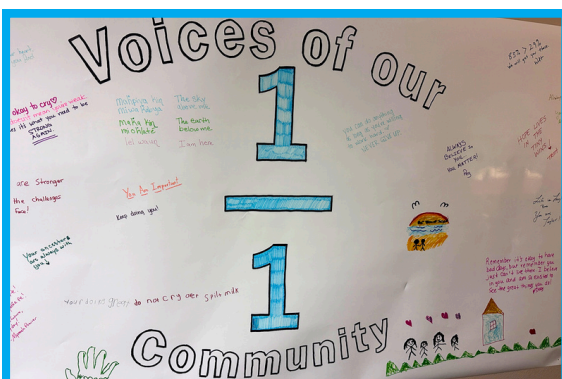
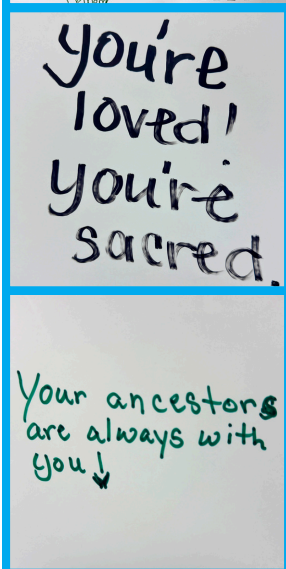
Exploring
land and nature



The Imprint, an independent news outlet covering child welfare and youth justice, featured Friends of the Children—He Sapa and the relationship between 8-year-old K.L.* and his Relative, Coleman. The story shares how Coleman has introduced K.L. to powwows, Sundance, Lakota language, horseback riding and fishing. Through their time together, they have built a relationship rooted in trust, culture and connection. “Knowing who they are, where they come from and who they come from, is huge,” Coleman shared. “When that child grows up, they’re going to understand the connection we have to everything that we walk on, that we breathe, that we see.” *Name changed for confidentiality.

Affirming
youth with
messages from
the community

Connecting
with culture



LIGHTNING ROUND!

Get to know our youth through three quick questions from our office grand opening!



What are your hopes for the future?



going to school Be an artist.
To TRAVEL THE WORLD Be singer!♥
to be a police officer TO BE A MENTOR



What helps you feel supported?



DOING CRAFTS my family
my mom Getting a hug.



Who is a mentor in your life and why?



My mentor is Shq ray she is the best mentor in my life and like my friend because she is nice

tye because she makes me feel better.

tye helps me in class and if i need it.

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH CULTURE

This spring, youth and caregivers came together for regalia-making sessions designed to strengthen connection, cultural identity and wellbeing.

As families across Rapid City prepared for Wacipi season, youth and caregivers worked side by side to create pieces that would allow them to fully participate in these important community gatherings. The sessions offered more than just crafting. They created space to share knowledge, build confidence and deepen relationships.

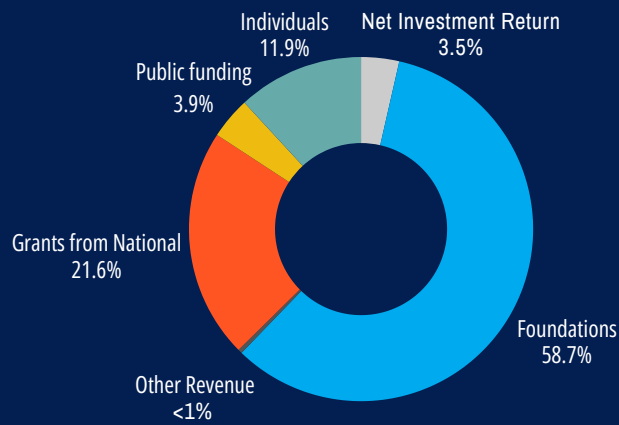
Many of our Relatives are dancers or have experience creating regalia, bringing lived experience and cultural knowledge to each session. Through this work, families built support networks and promoted physical and emotional wellbeing through culture, community and dance.



2026 FINANCIALS

Financial summary for September 1, 2025–August 31, 2026

REVENUE: \$1,087,154



EXPENSES: \$1,075,253

