

## **Turtle Island Project**

*“When it was time to begin building, the young people from Laguna and Acoma could not retain their enthusiasm. It was obvious from the way they threw themselves headlong into the task of building a stone adobe foundation for two Zuni-style bread ovens; that they hungered for this type of familiar; yet seldom performed activity. They began manifesting – from the beginning – age old patterns of effective communication, self-confidence, harmonious interaction, and teamwork. After completing the oven foundation project, they build a Navajo style shade house, and began digging the foundation for a new community amphitheater. The building activity, punctuated by the sound of clinging stone and children’s voices was of the same heartbeat – the heartbeat of Turtle Island. The group progressed from merely building a building to becoming building blocks of a shared vision of beauty and balance within the community.”*

### **-The Heartbeat of Turtle Island: A Journal of Native Service-Learning**

**Funded in 1998**

**W.K.Kellogg Foundation**

The National Indian Youth Leadership Project (NIYLP) is a Native-operated nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the development of leadership among Native youth to enable them to become capable individuals and positive contributors to their communities. In April 1995, the Kellogg Foundation awarded the NIYLP a four-year \$817, 069 grant to support the Turtle Island Project as a demonstration of the effectiveness of service-learning in Native American Education. Six K-12 schools and five colleges serving Native American students in five states were selected for this project. In 1997 supplemental funding of \$136,268 was awarded to expand work with Native American Colleges and Universities. Project directors underestimated the amount of support needed to stimulate pre-service teacher education programs to incorporate service learning. Additional funds from this request would enrich service-learning opportunities in teacher education methods courses and curriculum development, while also providing for collaborative involvement with the K-12 sites and a wider education and service learning audience.

*“I see a time when we don’t have to talk about service-learning, but we just talk about service as a way of being human.”*

-Ida Braveheart, Ojibway

Five years after the project began; NIYLP has made significant strides toward accomplishing its goals. The cadre of schools participating grew to 14, with 12 schools developing policies supportive of service-learning, and eight electing to fully integrate service-learning into their curriculum. Two of the schools became grantmaking entities in their own right, disseminating small service-learning grants to foster more projects. Four higher education sites implemented a requirement for service-learning in their teacher education programs and four sites served as incubators for service-learning projects in surrounding K-12 schools. Former NIYLP staff members have moved into other key positions. One has created the Center for Service-Learning at the University of New Mexico. Another has served as service-learning coordinator for the Santa Fe School District. Still another has been named principal at a school that integrates service-learning school-wide, and one has led a reservation-wide service-learning initiative for Native Americans.

Projects have ranged from tree plantings, cross-age tutoring, book drives, and screen door projects for the elderly, to Pueblo Bison stewardship projects, diabetes education campaigns, and community gardening projects in poverty-stricken areas of Mexico. Over the four-year period, the number of participants in the program included 7,708 students, 508 teachers, 118 administrators, 946 community members and 1,316 parents.

Evaluation results, using a culturally modified Search Institute national student survey, showed that students participating to quality and extended programs exhibited positive movement toward the altruism, concern for the environment, political involvement, and current level of involvement in service-learning projects and future intentions for service.

*“Creating in a group setting truly creates community. And that affects the way we see the world. This isn’t new; this collaboration among*

*Native people has been going on for centuries. It keeps the spirit of who we are alive.”*

-Nora Naranjo  
Santa Clara Pueblo, NM

One goal of the grant's goals focused on formalizing the organizational needs of NIYLP. While programming remains committed to traditional cultural principles of existence, the future of NIYLP as an organization demanded a more business-like approach, particularly regarding fund development. Calling upon the expertise of outside consultants such as White Bison and The Fundraising School, NIYLP implemented a long-range organizational stability plan, restructured its Board of Directors, conducted a management audit, and created a business plan. As a result, the organization's budget has increased by nearly one million dollars annually since 1997; the number of programs administered by NIYLP has increased two-fold; a professional journal on Native service learning has been launched; and the program now operated its own camp facility called Sacred Mountain Camp. In which an outdoor indigenous learning center has been built. The indigenous learning center will assure that the lessons learned during the course of this initiative, including the need for Indian youth to reconnect with the outdoors, will not be forgotten.