

# ROSEBUD LAKOTA TRIBE



## **White Buffalo Calf Woman Society, Inc. Mission, South Dakota**

**Founded:** 1977  
**Service area:** 954,527 acres in south central South Dakota  
**Population:** reservation population is approximately 12,800  
**Source of funding:** federal, private foundations

**Contact:** Tillie Black Bear, Director  
WBCWS, Inc.  
P.O. Box 227  
Mission, SD 57555  
605-856-2317  
Fax: 605-856-2994  
E-mail: wbcws@gwtc.net

## **Program Description**

In 2002, the White Buffalo Calf Woman's Society (WBCWS) celebrated its 25th anniversary. During those 25 years, WBCWS has provided life-saving assistance, advocacy, and assurance to those who are in need. Today, WBCWS is a model of what grassroots organizing and strong leadership can achieve in a Native community.

Located in Mission, South Dakota, on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, WBCWS has the distinction of being the first battered women's shelter for Native American women and the first shelter for women of color in the United States. Currently, WBCWS directly assists approximately 900 women and children each year, and helps countless others through outreach and education. Volunteers especially contribute to the shelter's success. WBCWS provides a 24-hour crisis line and volunteers staff the line from 11 p.m. to 8 a.m. This service ensures that WBCWS provides assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to anyone who needs it.

## **Strong Legacy**

In 1977, Director Tillie Black Bear and others began to explore the plight of Native American

women on the Rosebud Reservation, particularly the impact of violent victimization. This grassroots effort led to the establishment of the White Buffalo Calf Woman Society and the beginning of a new era of victim services on the reservation. Over the years, Black Bear's work has earned national recognition and honors. Black Bear received the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award in 2000 and was designated one of President George Bush's "Thousand Points of Light" in 1988. Tillie was one of 10 individuals honored as founders of the domestic violence movement in the United States at the 1999 Millennium Conference in Chicago. She is also one of the founding mothers of the South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

The White Buffalo Calf Woman Society has high visibility in the community. Many say that the "White Buffalo Calf Woman Society" has become a "household word." People know about the society and what it (and the shelter) does. WBCWS puts information out to the community in newspapers and newsletters. It produces public service announcements (PSAs) on the local radio station. It is unusual to find a community member who has not heard of the program.

## Safety for Victims

In the early years, WBCWS provided safe homes and motel rooms to victims of domestic violence and other crime. In 1980, the shelter moved into a rented facility that could house about 20 residents. In 1994, WBCWS purchased a building that was renovated in 1998. WBCWS can currently provide shelter for 45 people.

Unlike some victim service providers, WBCWS does not have professional counselors on staff. The staff does not assume that victims of crime automatically need counseling. Instead, WBCWS offers advocacy and support for victims who need help getting back on their feet. If a particular victim desires, counseling can be obtained from the Indian Health Service (IHS), with whom WBCWS has a good working relationship.

WBCWS offers a creative array of services, including

- ◆ Support groups.
- ◆ Transportation.
- ◆ Teen women's safety education.
- ◆ Crisis line.
- ◆ Advocacy (including personal, medical, legal, social services, educational, and housing).

WBCWS has even helped people return to their original home if they are not from Rosebud. In one case, WBCWS assisted a young woman financially who had been the victim of crime and was living in an unsafe situation. WBCWS located a safe place for her to stay in a faraway state where she was able to return to her own community of origin with a sense of security.

## Administration and Logistics

WBCWS currently has 18 staff members, mostly advocates, including legal advocates who help victims maneuver within the court systems, both tribal and state. WBCWS can pay for attorney fees for civil legal matters that

are related to victimization. About 85 percent of the cases are heard in tribal court, the other 15 percent go to state court.

Ninety percent of the victims who receive services from WBCWS are transported or referred by law enforcement. Approximately 60 percent are from the Rosebud Indian Reservation, 15 percent are from other indigenous nations, and 10 percent are non-Indian. In the State of South Dakota, WBCWS provides the second highest shelter days for victims. There is no limit on the length of time a victim can stay at the shelter.

Over the years, WBCWS has been awarded a variety of grant aid from various public and private agencies in areas from restorative justice to disabilities. In 1995, WBCWS, in collaboration with the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, was one of the original recipients of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Grant Program. The Rosebud Sioux Tribe has stipulated through resolutions that White Buffalo Calf Woman Society, Inc., is the primary agency that can access the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) monies on behalf of tribal members.

WBCWS is a collaboration of many compassionate and committed people and programs. Program staff work with many people from inside and outside the community and take special interest in working with tribal elders to find potential solutions to the reservationwide issue of domestic violence.

## Outreach and Training

In addition to providing shelter and assistance to victimized women and children, WBCWS provides multidisciplinary training on domestic violence and sexual assault for state and tribal agencies throughout South Dakota. Staff members give presentations at local schools, with special programs for kindergarten through 12th grade.

The tribe produced protocols for training and staff development for tribal government staff. WBCWS also provides training to Rosebud Indian Reservation law enforcement personnel, prosecutors, and judges. Moreover, WBCWS

maintains good relationships with other organizations throughout the state, including all nine reservations in South Dakota. These collaborative efforts have contributed to WBCWS's success.

WBCWS has initiated a partnership with IHS to receive a grant to develop screening tools and protocols to address domestic violence and/or sexual assault at Rosebud Indian Health Service.

## Keys to Success

- ◆ Develop public policies through creation of strong victim-centered tribal ordinances.
- ◆ Educate the community about the impact of violence on individuals. Help the tribal leaders become knowledgeable about the issues facing victims of violence.
- ◆ Incorporate traditional beliefs and cultural practices into the victim services arena. Traditional stories often contain strong statements about the rights of crime victims.
- ◆ Facilitate ongoing work with tribal elders. Include elders on the board of directors, and have them assist with cultural activities.

- ◆ Encourage model leadership based on consensus decisionmaking. Develop leadership roles for women by training and sharing information on issues affecting tribal women.

## Quotes

*Many winter-counts ago, a wakan (sacred) woman appeared among the Lakota people, bearing with her a truly marvelous gift. She was called the White Buffalo Calf Woman, and her gift is still with the Lakota people today—the sacred Cannunpa (pipe). The Pipe represents unity, truth, understanding and peace to all who practice the Teachings of the Pipe. The White Buffalo Calf Woman Society strives to follow the teachings that were given to the Oyate (people) by the White Buffalo Calf Woman. Our goals are peace, understanding and improved quality of life for all people. Only if there is spiritual peace and focused determination within our hearts can we hope to share these goals with others. That through learning and caring, through desire and hard work, through concern and inspiration, the vision of the White Buffalo Calf Woman may become a reality for all people.*

—WBCWS Web site