

By Tammi Beaulieu

The Red Lake Reservation, located in northern Minnesota, is home to about 6,000 Red Lake Ojibwe. The reservation covers all of lower Red Lake, the largest lake in Minnesota. Red Lake's Independence Day is July 6th. It is in honor of the courage the chiefs had when they resisted allotment during the negotiations of the 1889 Nelson Act (Barrett n.p.). The tribal government has sovereignty over the reservation, which makes it a "closed" reservation; one of only two in the United States (Barrett n.p.). Only enrolled Red Lake Band members can acquire land assignments. The Red Lake Band has its own formal constitution. It was written in response to the Nelson Act of 1889. I am very proud to come from The Red Lake Nation, a place where our ancestors believed that the land must be a resource for the children of the future. Today, however, we live in a darker reality. March 21, 2005, was a day that put Red Lake on the map as being the dismal place it is now. There are no malls, family restaurants, bowling alleys, or movie theaters. Really, there isn't much to do. The nearest town, Bemidji, is 30 miles away. Many teens drive around aimlessly, looking for something to do, or they go hang out at a friend's house. Some kids play basketball at the courts in the center of Red Lake. With the scarcity of jobs and things to keep youth busy, however, many get into drugs and alcohol, gang activity, teen pregnancy, and even death. This essay will explore some of the recent tragedies facing the youth of the Red Lake Reservation, and more importantly, some of the steps being taken to create a brighter future.

In a 2004 survey of ninth-grade girls at Red Lake High school, 81 percent said

they had thought about suicide at least once in their life; nearly half had said they attempted it (Collins n.p.). That is very high, even for an Indian reservation, where statistics show suicide rates are usually above the national rate. In the United States, suicide is the second leading cause of death for Native Americans ages 15-19, and it's the third leading cause of death for all American teenagers (Collins n.p.). In 2004, three teens committed suicide in Red Lake, and 69 teens attempted it.

On March 21, 2005, a 16-year-old boy, Jeff Wiese, committed suicide at his high school after taking the lives of nine other people, and wounding five more. After shooting his grandfather and his grandfather's companion at their house, he stole his grandfather's police car and guns. He then drove to Red Lake High School, located in the center of town. He went on a shooting spree, killing a security guard, a teacher, and five other students. He then took his own life. Among those who were shot was Jeff May, shot while trying to tackle Jeff Wiese. He was recently voted as *Reader's Digest* Hero of the Year.

Floyd "Buck" Jourdain, the chairman of the Red Lake Nation, addressed the issue on March 22, 2005, on WCCO MPLS. He stated that this "was the darkest day in the history of our tribe." The school shooting affected everybody on the reservation. The shootings were a reality check to the problems that really do exist on the reservation. The Red Lake Nation is a community of poverty. Thirty-nine percent of the population on the Red Lake Reservation lives below the poverty line (Lyans n.p.). The unemployment rate is currently at 60 percent; it has been as high as 80 percent (Lyans n.p.). In 2000, 33 percent of Red Lake

teens between 16 and 19 were neither enrolled in school, employed, or looking for work (Seviak n.p.). Gang involvement is also a huge issue in Red Lake. Gary Russell, Gang Prevention Specialist, stated that since March 21, 2005, there have been more and more young kids joining gangs as a sense of belonging (Beaulieu n.p.). Many people are blind to, refuse to see, or feel helpless to solve the problems facing our reservation today.

All hope is not lost, however. Bill Modzelseki, the Associate Deputy Under Secretary for the United States Department of Education Office for Safe and Drug Free Schools, came to Red Lake a few days after the shooting, asking what he could do for our community. He had emergency response money for school shootings. He aided in adding a mentoring component to the 21st Century Grant that was already in place. The 21st Century Grant goes to very poor communities, and the grant that's in place in Red Lake is a collaborative of four districts in Beltrami County: Red Lake, Blackduck, Kelliher, and Bemidji.

The mentoring component that was added to the already existing 21st Century Grant is an opportunity for youth in Red Lake to work with their community in bettering reservation children's lives. Mentors work with at-risk Native American youth through leadership trainings, mentoring workshops, and peacemaking workshops. Students learn about poverty, violence, and their culture through a variety of different activities. Mentors themselves have gone to leadership trainings through the LifeSkills Center for Leadership, funded by Famous Dave, a Native American who owns the Famous Dave's Barbeque Rib franchise. They learn what it takes to be a leader in their community, and the skills needed to

speaking up for themselves. The program offers them the opportunity to look inside themselves and to see what they have to offer to the world around them.

I have been part of the mentoring program since the summer of 2005. It has provided me an opportunity to work in my community, and it has helped me learn a lot about myself. I try to be a very positive role model in my community, and I hope that children in my community look up to me. When I interact with younger students I am able to put the training I'm receiving into practice. I'm able to foresee what our reservation needs to survive as a people into the next generation. Our ancestors taught us to be truthful and brave people. Our culture teaches us that the good of the tribe supercedes our individual interests. Through education and being a part of a mentor program on the Red Lake Reservation, I have an opportunity to make an impact on the lives of the children I work with, such as teaching them to be proud and confident of who they are. We still have a lot of obstacles to overcome, and this is one way I can contribute to that cause.

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