



RESPECTFUL SERVICE IN *Native American Communities*

As you consider your group's expectations, heart-preparation, prayer concerns and much more, know that we are too. We're thinking about those things as we organize trip logistics, plan evening activities and set up service opportunities. As we set the stage logistically, we are asking, "How can we also create positive expectations about the community for your group?" You see, each community has a distinctive story. And as you know, each member of your group also has a unique story. As we bring these stories together, our desire is to successfully connect you to the places you serve and dispel any stereotypes or fears.

LIFE IN A NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Beauty and pain... Even the most seasoned traveler can be overwhelmed by both in the Native American community. You will probably encounter evidence of a people group and culture that have been systematically oppressed for over 200 years. However, you will also encounter people who are passionate about their culture, their sense of identity and their relationships with the space around them. You may find yourself overwhelmed by the beauty of the landscape and humbled by those who are willing to share their culture and history with you.

Life in Native American communities may feel slower but to simply say it's slow misses the bigger picture. YouthWorks has been facilitating mission trips in Native American communities for over 30 years, and we are continually confronted with the fact that real service cannot happen outside the context of relationships. YouthWorks takes the idea of respectful service seriously in every community and for this reason, we place a great emphasis on cultural learning and story-sharing with community members. It is important to remember that respectful service sometimes looks like listening and learning rather than simply doing.

We desire for students, Adult Leaders and staff to learn that people matter, attitudes are important, and the posture of our hearts determines how we connect with others. Our hope is that your time in this community will not only raise awareness of life on the reservation, but also move you to reflect on the impact that you can have in your own community using the knowledge you will gain throughout your week.

As you serve in the community, you may encounter various levels of poverty and the challenges remaining from the oppression Indigenous people endure. The reality is that every community has its struggles. Rather than only seeing those struggles, look through them to learn from those you meet about the strengths of the community. You'll find that the stereotypes you've previously held may not hold true. We invite you to join us as we continue to let go of preconceptions and interact with people as they are and not as we expect them to be.

SERVING IN A NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Understanding a few cultural differences of a community before entering it will help your leaders and youth respond appropriately in a new place. Here are a few we'd like to highlight for you.

Time Sensitivity

Mainstream American culture is very task oriented. This, however, is not the case in these communities. Spending time with people is valued more than being on time. As a result, things won't always run on schedule—community members may be late for appointments or events. Spend time building a relationship before trying to get things done.

Quiet

Native American communities tend to be quiet places. Native culture values quietness and listening. Please be mindful that large groups of teenagers bring a lot of energy and noise to a quiet place. When in the community, be mindful of your energy and volume.

Listening

You might find that conversations feel slower paced and possibly awkward. This may be because listening is highly valued in Native American culture. Don't be afraid of silent times in a conversation. Sit in the silence, enjoy the beauty around you and wait for someone else to speak.

Handshakes / Eye Contact

Some Native American cultures don't value eye contact. Handshakes may also feel different, as some cultures don't value a firm handshake. Come with a soft grip then simply match the type of handshake you are given.

Photographs

Some people do not want to be photographed while others do not mind. Some places or events should not be photographed because they are sacred to the community. Be respectful and always ask permission before taking a picture.

Being like Jesus in this Community

Native American communities are complex places built on a difficult history. It's easy for all of us to label a community and its people with all sorts of stereotypes. These labels feed our perceptions and influence how we approach people, situations and relationships. As you prepare, think about how you will approach each person and situation with the kind of grace that Jesus demonstrated to each person he met along the way. The following characteristics¹ are great examples of how your students and adult leaders can prepare their hearts for their mission week.

Serve with Humility

Jesus came to earth with the attitude of a servant. Jesus did not come as a powerful king, but as a powerless infant and later in life a carpenter. If you want to serve others, have a humble attitude. Become a servant focused on listening instead of speaking and learning instead of teaching. Come with a humble heart that is ready to jump in and serve wherever needed, whether it's cleaning a bathroom or listening to a life story. Come ready to put the needs of those you serve above your own.

Don't Depend on Privilege

Jesus had access to privilege and wealth, but he voluntarily chose poverty instead. Your time in this community may feel like poverty. The sleeping arrangements are probably less comfortable than you have at home, the food may not be what you prefer and the temperature may be uncomfortable. Our hope is that this week of service will remind you to depend more on Jesus by living outside convenience and, sometimes, going without.

Encounter Brokenness

Jesus stepped out of the order and harmony of heaven into the disorder and brokenness of Earth. You are called to do the same. You will encounter brokenness during your time in the community. God is calling you to be present among the broken, not to draw conclusions or judge. Instead, open your eyes wide to the needs around you, both in your YouthWorks community and back home.

¹ Muriu, O. (2009, December 29). *Pace and place of missions today. Urbana Conference 2009*. Retrieved on January 28, 2011, from <http://www.intervarsity.org/page/urbana-09-audio>

We hope that this information helps as you continue to prepare for your trip. Please take time to talk with your group about expectations and the type of community you will be traveling to. Groups who have intentionally taken time to process and prepare before they begin their trip have more meaningful individual growth, team solidarity and community relationships.