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National Relief Charities Supports Tribal Partners By Roseanna Renaud, Times Correspondent



National Relief Charities, a nonprofit whose mission is “To help Native American people improve the quality of their lives by providing opportunities for them to bring about positive changes in their communities,” has been serving South Dakota reservations for twenty years. National Relief Charities (NRC) partners with fifty five programs on the Pine Ridge, as well as other programs on the Rosebud and twenty three other plains reservations. NRC focuses on reservations such as Pine Ridge, where unemployment is prevalent and preventative health care or shopping is an hour or more away. Transport trucks, bedecked with the burgundy and black feathers of the organization’s logo, are a welcome sight on many a reservation road.

NRC sees itself as a catalyst for positive change in supporting tribal programs already in place. Program partners work with NRC in identifying community needs that impact the young and elderly. One such program is OST Healthy Start, where Roberta Ecoffey and her staff have been working toward the goal of healthier moms and infants. NRC supports those goals by providing practical incentive items that are needed by new moms and that also stretch the family budget, such as diapers, strollers, and play pens. NRC provides these items to the Healthy Start for its participants, yet the items are not free. NRC spokesperson Helen Oliff explains, “Our real mission is creating more opportunities for positive change, and in that, the incentive items provided to Healthy Start are used to motivate and increase participation in their program. To receive the incentive items, new moms must complete a series of immunizations for baby, post natal visits, or parenting classes.” In effect, the items are earned through participation, and the form of the participation also benefits mom and baby. OST Healthy Start has used these incentives to increase attendance and currently has a top ranking among Healthy Starts in the region.



Oliff reports that support related to preventative health care is popular among program partners. In addition to health and wellness programs, NRC works with nursing homes, shelters, behavioral programs, jails, colleges, schools, head starts, boys and girls clubs, senior centers, job training, life skills programs, and more. “NRC has a breadth of services that lets us support the majority of reservation programs,” said Oliff.



National Relief Charities, through its reservation partners and programs in the Plains (American Indian Relief Council, Sioux Nation Relief Fund, and Native American Aid), help improve the quality of life for about 62,000 American Indians annually. NRC wants the people to know that they are here for the long run and strive to be a consistent resource for reservation programs. After two decades of service, that appears to be a definite certainty.

To learn more about NRC, visit www.nrcprograms.org

