A Call To All Waldorf Schools And AWSNA Leaders

Tuition free Waldorf education for Native American/First Nations/Alaskan Indian students

Proposal for support for NA/FN/AI students – a call for action

The history of the colonization of the American continents, as we all know, has been built on genocide, broken treaties, assimilation, slavery, and a devastating persecution. Many indigenous nations were annihilated, others were forced to leave their homelands and move on to reservations. These reservations are often in areas where survival is difficult, almost impossible, or in a climate and landscape completely different from what their cultural knowledge is built around. We are all aware of the cruel and gruesome actions that we now know as the Trail of Tears.

Indian Reservations were originally prison camps, and today Native Americans still live on 326 reservations and still have their prisoner numbers, known as U-number. There are 574 federally recognized tribes in the USA. Many Native Americans moved to towns or suburbs in the search for work and education, in the hopes of a better life and opportunities.

This is the situation today, but this is not the end of history for Native Americans. It continues, and we all are the writers of the story of the future. What we do or do not do will determine the future of our children. Unfortunately, the American people and government have failed so far to make an effort and find a way to reconcile with and to offer a perspective for a positive future for Native Americans. Some states, for example Oklahoma, have started to give some of the tribal lands back to the indigenous people of those lands. But still, 131 years after the last massacre at Wounded Knee, SD, Indian reservations are among the poorest counties in the US.

Native Americans still struggle and suffer severely under historical and intergenerational trauma. The responsibility to address this trauma has been neglected and deflected by those who have imposed it and those who still benefit from it. We must work on solutions and change. It is our responsibility to search and find ways to support Native Americans on their path of healing and recovery. What can Waldorf Schools do?

Recently Waldorf schools have started to recognize the original owners of the land occupied by or near to the school, acknowledging by name the original nation that used to live where that particular Waldorf school is located. This is a good start and gesture, but it refers to the past, assuming the original inhabitants are not in the picture anymore. The recognition states: We know this used to be your land, but we are here now, and we say thank you!

There remains an open question, “What now?” Although these well-meant land acknowledgment statements are welcome, they usually avoid addressing any past wrongdoing and do not yet offer an extended hand of reconciliation and restitution. Something more must follow - a deed. If we recognize that the land our schools are located on was indeed taken unlawfully, we must go into action.

We are in the age of DEI, but we hardly have any Native American children in our Waldorf Schools. One reason for this is that most of the Native population lives in poverty and cannot afford tuition for a Waldorf school. They live either on reservations or in poor communities, not where most Waldorf schools are located. There is only one Waldorf School located on an Indian reservation in the US, the Lakota Waldorf School, and this school is operating free of tuition and also offers free healthy meals to all students.

Let not November be just one month when we honor Native Americans. Let us begin to work and implement a plan to include indigenous students in our Waldorf Schools. Our proposal is to open all Waldorf Schools to Native American students and waive tuition fees. Along with our recognition that we occupy tribal land, would this not be an appropriate gesture of reconciliation? Tuition-free Waldorf schooling would not mean that Waldorf schools would be overrun by Native American students. It would merely allow the possibility of equal opportunity. It would mean a path of healing offered to those we owe so much.
Waldorf education is more than teaching, it is a healing pedagogy, and therefore has enormous potential to bring healing and a positive future to the Native Americans children. As Waldorf Schools we must strive to serve all children, and in reconciliation, toward reparation that goes further than words, but is action and deeds.

We truly hope Waldorf Schools are open and willing to face this issue and work out an action plan. We owe it to the indigenous people, and this would be an exemplary gesture for the rest of the country.

Eligibility
The question will arise as to who is eligible to join a Waldorf school as a Native American. There are 574 federally or state recognized indigenous nations in the USA, and there are more than 200 indigenous nations that are not federally recognized. Every Native American must be registered at the indigenous nations of his or her origin. Tribal constitutions determine the criteria for an individual's tribal enrollment. Registered tribal members receive a tribal ID. This tribal ID is commonly used to identify a tribal member and could be used as a means for eligibility to join a Waldorf school. In the case of indigenous nations that are not federally recognized, it would be the decision of the specific Waldorf school to decide how to work with eligibility. Our recommendation for a student that claims to be a member of a tribe that Is not federally recognized, is to ask for some kind of proof or documentation.

Funding:
Waldorf schools must look for grants, donors and other sources of funding to cover the tuition for Native students; there are many possibilities. If AWSNA and all Waldorf schools launch this plan of action on behalf of Native American students, it will demonstrate to the rest of the country and to the world how true and meaningful reconciliation with Native Americans could begin. It will demonstrate how we as a Waldorf community are taking responsibility for the consequences of history of the last 500 years and are bringing a plan of action onto the stage.

It is important to publish such a plan--that Waldorf schools throughout the country open their doors to all Native American children who wish to attend a Waldorf School free of tuition, because we are existing on their lands, which we recognize were stolen. This can be an exemplary paradigm and could serve as a model and inspiration for other organizations or programs to create new paths for reconciliation in action.

For the faculty of the Lakota Waldorf School,
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