

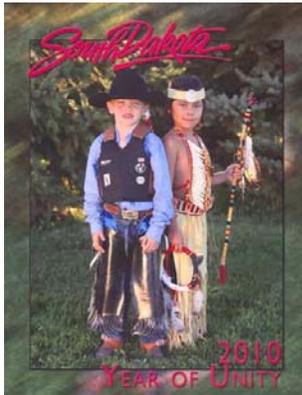
The path to a unified community

After using dialogue to address poverty and build prosperity, residents of the rural town of Wagner, S.D., realized that there was something holding them back from making real progress: they needed to address the long history of racial inequity and tensions between the white people living in the town and the American Indians living nearby.

The racial tensions run deep, spanning many generations. In 2008, they began the first of many ongoing rounds of dialogues to address divisive issues in a peaceful manner. Eliminating racism and unpacking historical trauma won't happen overnight, and Wagner residents are committed to achieving their vision of a unified community.

Subtle changes can be seen throughout the town: Some American Indians have invited white people to attend traditional events and ceremonies. A movie theater owned by a white person displays a "Thank you" sign in both English and the local native language. And, more American Indians are moving into town.

Study circles have been implemented in the school system as well. As a result, teachers are more intentional about creating inclusive curriculums. Native symbols and ceremonies are now being incorporated into school functions. More American Indians are attending school events typically viewed as "white," such as prom.



*Flyer for Wagner's 2010
Year of Unity celebration*

Efforts are being made to build relationships beyond the study circles through book clubs, film screenings, and informal gatherings of study circles alumni.

Wagner residents can point to many larger successes including:

- The establishment of a small business incubator. Half of the board members are American Indian, and half are white.
- The redefinition of the Secretary of Indian Affairs to a liaison between the state government and the American Indian community. This position was formerly housed in the same department as tourism.
- A significant increase in graduation rates of American Indians, which is now 30%. Before the program, very few American Indians graduated high school.



*Wagner celebrates their successes in the
annual Labor Day parade*

About Everyday Democracy

A national leader in the field of civic participation and community change, Everyday Democracy helps people of different backgrounds and views talk and work together to create communities that work for everyone.

www.everyday-democracy.org