

For release: May 11, 2022

Contact: Megkian Doyle at 406-209-0109

NATIVE AMERICAN NONPROFIT HOLDS LAND DEDICATION FOR FAMILY HEALING CENTER

LODGE GRASS, MONTANA—Native American nonprofit, Mountain Shadow Association, is holding a land dedication and community breakfast on Friday, May 20, at 10 a.m., for a new Family Healing Center on the Crow Reservation in Lodge Grass. The center, first of its kind in Montana, will focus on repairing and restoring relationships within the family to improve the health and vitality of the whole community.

According to Mountain Shadow Association Executive Director Megkian Doyle, “We look at the Family Healing Center as an ecosystem. The child-centered, trauma healing center will keep families whole and transform the family together in the same village. Our goal is to help the broader community heal by providing families the resources and tools to succeed.”

Community challenges include an unemployment rate of 89 percent, as well as high foster care and incarceration rates. In Montana, Native Americans are incarcerated at over 5 times the rate of non-Natives, and Native American children are 70 percent more likely to be placed in foster care than non-Natives in similar circumstances, according to Doyle. Mountain Shadow estimates that 50 percent of Lodge Grass children are raised by their grandparents.

Mountain Shadow Certified Behavioral Health Peer Support Specialist, Misti Toineeta, was given up by her birth mother and raised by her grandmother. She had her first child at age 16 and struggled as a young adult with addiction and abandonment issues. After years of treatment, she is now sober and pleased to give back. “People have had to travel far to get help,” Toineeta says. “Our goal is to have a place here, where we can support each other, build each other up, and create a safe community.”

The new healing center will teach parenting skills, provide construction-based mental health counseling for men, help with addiction recovery, and confront crime and sexual abuse through restorative justice. Construction of a Restorative Justice Center for youth, to help connect youth with the community in partnership with adult mentors, is expected to begin by summer.

Board Treasurer and Education Liaison, Beth Howe-Yarlott, will lead the Land Dedication. The event will include an opening prayer, induction of new board members, and unveiling of plans for a new Lodge Grass skatepark and the long-term vision for the healing center. The event will kick off Lodge Grass’ annual community clean-up days on May 20 and 21. Mountain Shadow staff and volunteers will tend their gardens and assist with cleanup of the town.

The new healing center land was purchased last month through a \$93,000 grant from the Gianforte Family Foundation. Adjacent to Mountain Shadow’s existing property, it includes a small house and drop-in center providing 25-40 people a day with peer counseling. The two properties will provide housing for 12 children, the Restorative Justice Center, an industrial kitchen to serve a new preschool and local indigenous restaurants, and a small gift shop to help sustain operations.

Doyle says, “We want every kid in Lodge Grass to have peace and well-being, and to support families in their healing.” She says, “It’s the only center of its kind in Montana, and there’s not really anything exactly like this anywhere.” Mountain Shadow’s hope is for the new center to serve as a model for five other districts on the Crow Reservation and on other tribal lands in Montana.

For information on Mountain Shadow or the Land Dedication, contact Doyle at 406-209-0109.

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