



Re: Native American Match Families

Dear Sponsor:

You have been matched with a Native American family from South Dakota. You may want to know a little more about the culture and geography of that region of the country, so we hope this information helps and that you will look online or seek other resources to help you learn more.

There are six reservations in the state. Until recently, these were administered primarily by the Bureau of Indian Affairs – a centralized governmental agency. During the Clinton administration, more programs were shifted over to the tribal councils of these six reservations. This decentralization gave more local control over programs and resources, so each reservation has a different governing body and has different levels of success...much like more commonly known town and city governments.

The Pine Ridge/Oglala reservation is probably the poorest of all of these reservations. Unemployment runs at 80% or more! Often the people need help with food, heat and the very basics of life.

Hunger is a definite and very real problem. Only some families are lucky enough to have running water in the home. You may want to find out what your family has for kitchen facilities, since families are likely to be lacking in things you might find basic necessities. There are no large stores close by. The tribal stores are in the towns, but are more like convenience stores, and there are no large department stores. Often families have to drive hundreds of miles to shop at a store or to see a doctor. Distances are considerable, and if families are lucky enough to have a car/truck, it often has high mileage even if it isn't very old. Families that don't have a car, usually have to pay someone to take them to the closest city to go to the doctor or buy supplies.

The concept of "family" is critical in the Sioux culture. The main source of emotional support and sense of belonging come from the immediate and extended family. Do not be surprised if your match family seems to shrink and grow at times as extended families such as cousins, nieces and nephews come and go in the household. In general, families there are much closer than is often seen in general society.

You may want to ask your match family about the holidays that they celebrate. They may have holidays that you don't celebrate or you may have some that they don't celebrate. One good way to learn about another culture is to learn what their rituals and customs are. This is a good place to start conversation and a way to open the door to sharing your cultures with each other.

One of the primary meeting places on the reservation seems to be the post office. This is where friends meet friends. To get a "real" letter is often a thrill that is shared with friends.

315 Loshier St., Suite 100, Hernando, MS 38632 ~ Telephone: 1-800-268-9928 ~ Web: www.boxproject.org

Our Mission: To encourage and enrich the lives of families and individuals living in poverty in rural America by establishing meaningful relationships, promoting education, and offering material aid.



Addresses in the area may not be what you are accustomed to. Most families have a P.O. Box, but may also be able to receive boxes at their work or their house, but they may not have typical house numbers or road names. They may reference mile markers or other landmarks to direct people to where they live. Some shipping companies that require a street address have successfully delivered mail to recipient families on the reservation with only the available information, like a combination of the number from the PO Box and road name. We highly recommend that you insure anything you send there, just in case there are delivery problems. You may want to check on Chatterbox — www.boxproject.org/discuss.html — for more advice on this issue.

If you're interested in learning some of the Oglala Sioux language yourself, ask your match family to help you with it. Remember, their language and customs are a source of pride and this gives them a way to give back and share with you.

We have found the people in the area to be very polite, respectful, and honest. They may be wary of strangers at first, but warm up fast once trust is established. While visiting Kyle we heard a story of a lady that left the reservation for a job interview, and found out that she did not get the job because she wouldn't look the interviewer in the eye. The interviewer did not understand that in their culture, it is considered disrespectful to look someone in the eye, and he misinterpreted it as dishonesty.

There is great division and stress on the families about which culture to adopt. Some families press their children to "learn the white man's ways" while others push maintaining the old traditions. Most families try to blend the two, but it can be an area of stress within families.

Lakota Society, by James Walker, is a good resource book if you are interested in learning more. Also, check out the Summer 2003 newsletter (online at www.boxproject.org/newsletter.html), it includes several articles from board members that attended the board meeting and visited the reservations in South Dakota in June 2003.

Some ideas:

What are some of the common needs? Just ask your match family. Chances are good that they will need almost anything and everything. The area is indeed very poor.

If you want to send money, we recommend money orders. Do NOT send checks or cash. There are no banks on the reservation, and check-cashing services often charge large fees.

We recommend that you talk to your match family about the types of food that they like to eat before you send them food. The food that you enjoy might not always be appealing to them.

Art materials, pictures, drawings and other crafts seem to be especially enjoyed and a great way to engage the children.

If your match has family members that want to attend college or vocational school, make sure they know about The Box Project Education Fund. Applications are available on our Website at www.boxproject.org/edfundsapp.pdf. You may want to print it and send it to them—especially if they do not have Internet access.

If you do have any questions or concerns, please contact us. We want to make sure this match is a good fit for both you and your match family.

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