



WHAT TO EXPECT SERVING IN *Native American Communities*

Thank you for preparing to visit a Native American community this summer! By the time you arrive, we'll have been getting ready for your group for over nine months, hoping that your students' experience in a reservation setting will deepen the way they think about God, their neighbors and themselves.

As you consider your group's expectations, heart-preparation, prayer concerns and much more, know that we are too. We're thinking about those things as we organize trip logistics, plan evening activities and set up service opportunities. As we set the stage logistically, we are asking, "How can we also create positive expectations about the community for your group?" You see, each community has a distinctive story. And as you know, each member of your group also has a unique story. As we bring these stories together, our desire is to successfully connect you to the places you serve and dispel any stereotypes or fears.

LIFE IN A NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Beauty and pain... Even the most seasoned traveler can be overwhelmed by both in the Native American community. You will probably encounter evidence of a people group and culture that have been systematically oppressed for over 200 years. However, you will also encounter men, women and children who are passionate about their culture, their sense of identity and their grasp of the relationships with the space around them. You will be overwhelmed by the beauty of the landscape and humbled by those who are willing to share their culture and history with you.

Life in Native American communities may feel slower but to simply say it's slow misses the bigger picture. YouthWorks has been facilitating mission trips in Native American communities for over 20 years, and we are continually confronted with the fact that real service cannot happen outside the context of relationships. YouthWorks takes the idea of respectful service seriously in these communities and for this reason, we place a great emphasis on cultural learning and story-sharing with community members. It is important to remember that respectful service sometimes looks like listening and learning rather than simply doing.

We desire for students, adult leaders and staff to learn that people matter, attitudes are important, and the posture of our hearts determines how we connect with others. Our hope is that your time in this community will not only raise awareness of life on the reservation, but also move you to reflect on the impact that you can have in your own community using the knowledge you will gain throughout your week.

As you serve in the community, you may encounter various levels of poverty and the challenges remaining from the oppression Indigenous people have endured. The reality is that every community has its struggles. Rather than only seeing the poverty, look through it to learn from those you meet in the community. You'll find that the stereotypes you've previously held may not hold true. We invite you to join us as we continue to let go of preconceptions and interact with people as they are and not as we expect them to be.

SERVING IN A NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Understanding a few cultural differences of a community before entering it will help your leaders and youth respond appropriately in a new place. Here are a few we'd like to highlight for you.

Time Sensitivity Main stream American culture is very task-oriented. This however, is not the case in these communities. Spending time with people is valued more than being on time. As a result, things won't always run on schedule—community members may be late for appointments or events. Simply spend time with people before trying to get things done. The focus of life in these communities is always about relationships. Schedules and plans are secondary to friendships.

Quietness Native American communities tend to be quiet places. Native culture values quietness and listening. Please be mindful that large groups of teenagers bring a lot of energy and noise to a quiet place. When in the community, try to be mindful of this energy and volume.

Listening You might find that conversations feel awkward. This may be because Native American culture values listening. Don't be afraid of silent times in a conversation, sit in the silence, enjoy the beauty around you and wait for someone to speak. Good things can happen in conversations when you are not trying to push an agenda, rather be ready to simply sit and listen.

Handshakes / Eye Contact Some Native American cultures don't value eye contact; this is normal. Handshakes may also be different, as some cultures don't value a firm handshake. Come with a soft grip.

Photographs Some people do not want to be photographed while others do not mind. Some places or events should not be photographed because they are sacred for the tribe. Be respectful and ask permission.

We hope that this information helps as you continue to prepare for your trip. Please take time to talk with your group about expectations and the type of community you will be traveling to. Groups who have intentionally taken time to process and prepare before they begin their trip have more meaningful individual growth, team solidarity and community relationships.

Being Like Jesus in this Community

Native American communities are complex places built on a difficult history. It's easy for all of us to label a community and its people with all sorts of stereotypes. These labels feed our perceptions and influence how we approach people, situations and relationships. As you prepare, think about how you will approach each person and situation with the kind of grace that Jesus demonstrated to each person he met along the way. The following characteristics¹ are great examples of how your students and adult leaders can prepare their hearts for their mission week.

Serve with Humility

Jesus came to earth with the attitude of a servant. If you want to serve others, have a humble attitude. Become a servant focused on listening instead of speaking and learning instead of teaching. Come with a humble heart that is ready to jump in and serve wherever needed, whether it's cleaning a bathroom or listening to a life story.

Embrace Powerlessness

Jesus did not come as a powerful king, but as a powerless infant and, later in life, a carpenter. Do the same. Don't seek positions of power or wealth. Come ready to put the needs of those you serve above your own.

Don't Depend on Privilege

Jesus had access to privilege and wealth, but he voluntarily chose poverty instead. Your time on site may feel like poverty. The sleeping arrangements are probably less comfortable than you have at home, the food may not be what you prefer, and there might not be air conditioning. Our hope is that this week of service will remind you to depend more on Jesus by living outside convenience and, sometimes, going without.

Encounter Brokenness

Jesus stepped out of the order and harmony of heaven into the disorder and brokenness of Earth. You are called to do the same. You will encounter brokenness during your time in the community. God is calling you to be present among the broken, not to draw conclusions or judge. Instead, open your eyes wide to the needs around you, both in your YouthWorks community and back home.

¹ Muriu, O. (2009, December 29). *Pace and place of missions today*. Urbana Conference 2009. Retrieved on January 28, 2011, from <http://www.intervarsity.org/page/urbana-09-audio>