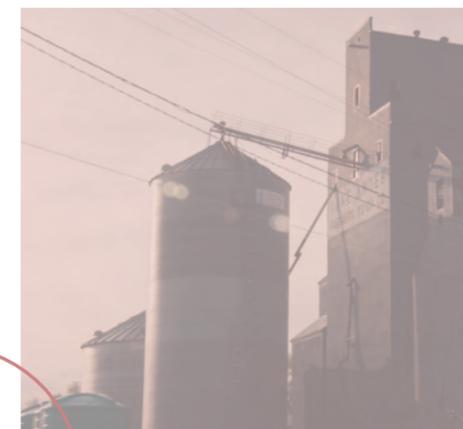


# NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY BOARD



INNOVATION STORY  
No 3

## Working From the Ground Up

STORY BY  
**Marcie Rendon**

The Native American Community Board is a trusted space for the Ihanktonwan (Yankton Sioux) people — an organization that addresses issues on the reservation through cultural preservation, education, and coalition building, and works to build a safe community for women and children both on the reservation and beyond.

**“These reports  
are sacred because  
they are the voices of  
the women.”**

**Charon Asetoyer**  
Native American Community Board



**YEARS ACTIVE**  
Founded in 1985

**GEOGRAPHY**  
South Dakota / Native nations

**BUDGET**  
\$500,000 – \$999,999

**LEADER**  
Charon Asetoyer

# INNOVATION

## NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY BOARD

NACB takes an organic approach to problem-solving, with a process driven by community input and deep inclusion of people impacted by the issues it seeks to address.

### Breakthrough

Through a combination of advocacy and direct service, NACB works to build safer communities for Indigenous people on the Yankton Sioux Reservation and in the surrounding area. The creation of the Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center is a powerful example of NACB's bold, multifaceted strategies to protect human rights.



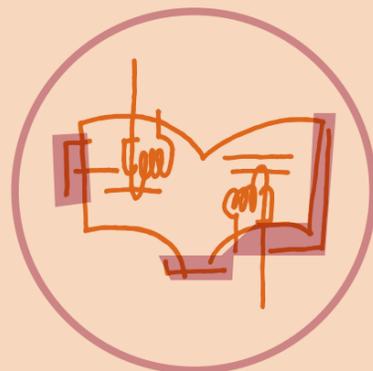
### Coming to the Table

NACB challenges policy head on, starting by listening to community voices on how things could be better. NACB elevates these policy goals to the levels of power, taking conversations from kitchen table to boardroom table, from town hall to the halls of Congress.



### A Community in Collaboration

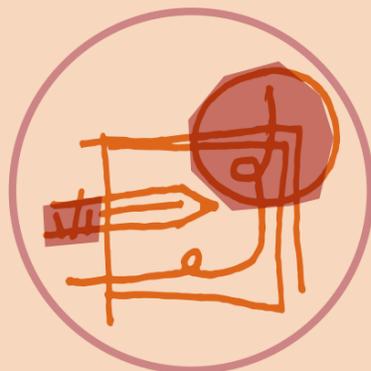
Questions of legal jurisdiction can often create challenges in tribal communities. NACB builds partnerships with courts, law enforcement and like-minded organizations to help provide understanding of the jurisdictional issues and build more supportive systems.



EMPHASIZE LEARNING



LISTENING



RESOURCEFUL

## From Fort Randall Casino and Hotel on the Yankton Reservation in South Dakota, one can see deep green rolling hills for miles in one direction.

In the other three directions, it is the same lush springtime green, but a river runs thickly through the valleys. As we stand outside in the early evening admiring the uninterrupted view, Charon Asetoyer, founder and CEO of the Native American Community Board (NACB), pulls up in a white SUV and tells us, "Hop in."

We head on over to Marty, South Dakota, for a showing of the documentary "Amá" — a word that means "mother" in many Native American languages. Charon and her organization have put their hearts and souls into the film for the past 10 years. It chronicles the lives of Sally Torpy and Yvonne Swan, whom the United States government sterilized without their knowledge or consent in the 1970s. Between 1960 and 1980, thousands of Native American women were sterilized without their knowledge. This work, prioritizing women's reproductive rights, is Charon's central focus.

The film is shown in a classroom at Ihanktonwan Community College. A small group of women watch silently as Torpy and Swan tell their stories of leaving home, going to a hospital for medical care and finding out after the fact that they cannot bear children. Heavy silence fills the room as the film ends. Charon asks whether anyone has any thoughts about it. Did they know this history of their grandmas, moms, aunties? Women silently shake their heads side to side. One woman quietly says, "I didn't know about this. I'm kind of lost. I didn't know this." She gets up to leave. She is pregnant.

On the drive back to the Fort Randall Casino hotel, Charon talks about her passion for getting the historical knowledge about this reproductive abuse out into the community. In her opinion, creating awareness is key to change. The drive across prairie and hills highlights the isolation of life on the reservation. There are miles between houses. Miles before you will find a grocery store or an open gas station. The only place to eat at 8:30 at night is in the casino restaurant. That is, if it hasn't closed for the evening.

## Creating awareness is key to change.

# COMING TO THE TABLE



The next morning at NACB headquarters in the town of Lake Andes (population 837), a tour of the small house reveals the multifaceted services the organization provides.

In the basement is the food shelf. On the first floor is a kitchen where staff prepares food for feasts and other gatherings. There is a classroom that in the summertime hosts a Dakota language class for children. There is the Women's Lodge, providing shelter for women suffering from domestic abuse or sexual assault. Upstairs there is meeting space, the executive offices and the KDKO 89.5 FM radio station. We sit at a table, lunch laid out. It is reminiscent of any kitchen table in any reservation home.

Charon and her administrative assistant, Elizabeth Black Bull, map out for us the ongoing work of the organization, which began in 1985: "The organization is direct service to the community, which allows us to formulate policy," Charon explains. "We see where things need to be changed because they tell us how their lives are. The work we do is from the ground up."

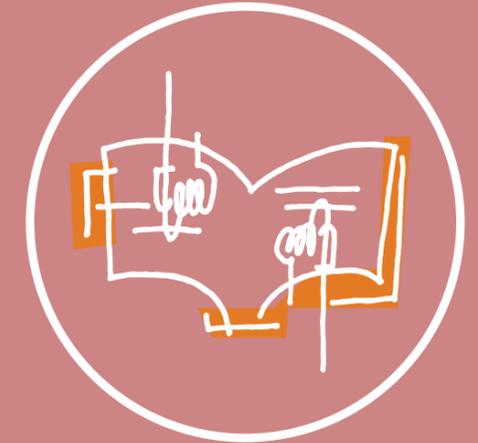


Native American Community Board Offices



Yankton Sioux Reservation

CHARACTERISTIC  
No  
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EMPHASIZE  
LEARNING

HOW CAN  
ORGANIZATIONS  
MAKE DATA A  
BIGGER PART  
OF THEIR  
DECISION-MAKING  
PROCESS?

"Data can be helpful if you let it or it can be intimidating. We have used it to help us develop and improve our programs. Having people fill out a questionnaire of maybe only a few questions can be extremely helpful in finding out if your program or activities are helpful to the people you are trying to assist. You can pass out a questionnaire or you can bring people together in a roundtable to gather information. Sometimes it is very helpful to bring people together so you can engage people in a two-way dialogue. We find that process extremely helpful and have used it to help guide our programming."

**Charon Asetoyer**

Native American Community Board



Healing and Recovery



KDKO 89.5 FM Radio



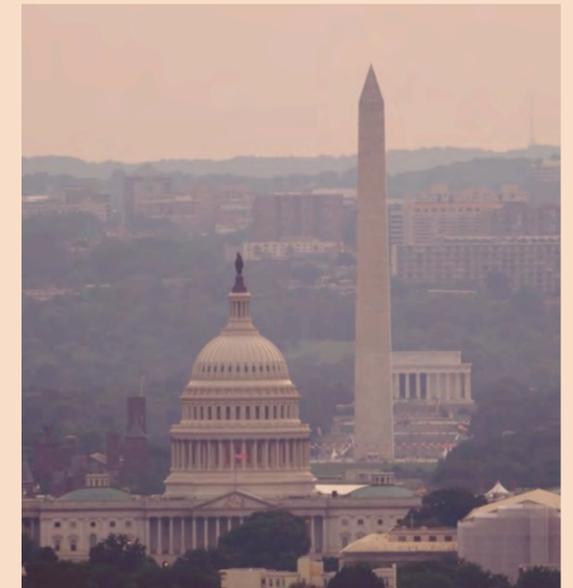
Direct Services to the Community

“We see where things need to be changed because they tell us how their lives are.”

**Charon Asetoyer**  
Native American Community Board



Elizabeth Black Bull



Influencing Policy Changes

# “We create safe places, not just here but at gatherings around the country.”

**Charon Asetoyer**

Central Regional Education Association

According to Charon and Elizabeth, almost all their groundbreaking work originates around a table — a table where everyone has a PhD, whether that is a PhD in academics or in the hard knocks of life. NACB listens and gathers data as women talk about what they are living through, what policies are in place in their communities that are barriers and how those barriers affect them and the women around them.

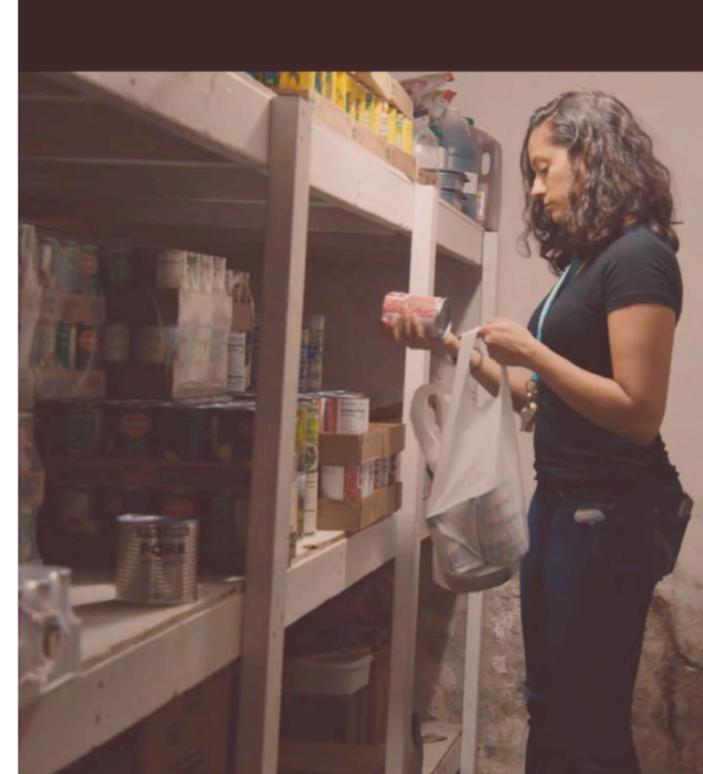
“We create safe places, not just here but at gatherings around the country, for women to share and disclose,” says Charon. “It is usually 20 women, give or take. A sisterhood is formed whether those circles are in Austin, Texas; Pierre, South Dakota; or Oklahoma City. If we have an issue we know is impacting women and we want it changed, we form a committee.”

The new committee will then begin reaching out and setting up conference calls to activists and other individuals in other communities. “For example, if in Austin there is a women’s shelter that is doing interesting work, we will hear

about it,” Charon says. “And they will recommend women that would be good to attend the roundtable or focus group that we are having. We will ask the new women who have been recruited if they know someone else to recruit.”

When there is a policy NACB wants to challenge, it sets about convening roundtables with women from all directions. Calling into the networks they have formed over many years, they sit down with women and ask, “What about this policy concerns you? How has this policy affected you? How will any changes affect you? What is being done in regard to this policy in your part of the country?”

It was through this method of networking and organizing over a period of years that Charon and her agency learned they were not the only ones having issues with emergency rooms not using proper protocols for women coming in after incidents of assault. As women disclosed their stories of rape and assault, they also shared stories of the local Indian Health Service (IHS) refusing to give them Plan B contraceptive, in violation of



Food Pantry

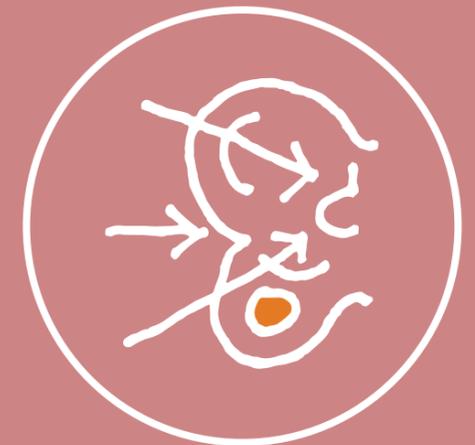


Native American Community Board Offices

CHARACTERISTIC

NO

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LISTENING

**WHAT KIND OF PROCESSES CAN ORGANIZATIONS PUT INTO PLACE TO CENTER COMMUNITY VOICES IN THEIR WORK?**

“A community-based organization should include members of the community when identifying issues to be addressed, in order for their voices to be reflected in the way an organization addresses the identified issues. Most helpful is to form program committees or advisory committees made up of a diverse section of the community.”

**Charon Asetoyer**

Native American Community Board

“The whole reproductive community saw this as a victory for everyone.”

**Charon Asetoyer**  
Native American Community Board

federal policy. “Plan B is a dignified way for women who have been violated to receive services,” says Charon.

Armed with the stories from the roundtable, NACB gathered statistics and created policy plans with standardized recommendations ready to put into action. Charon pats a stack of documents on the table beside her. “These reports are sacred because they are the voices of the women.”

The Plan B contraceptive project took NACB to Washington twice to meet with White House staff and the Justice Department. In the end, NACB’s diligence on behalf of Native women helped make Plan B available over the counter at all IHS hospitals, in compliance with Food and Drug Administration policies. “We got calls and emails from all over. The whole reproductive community saw this as a victory for everyone,” Charon says.



Direct Services to the Community



Native American Community Board Offices



Yankton Sioux Reservation



Transitional Housing Program



Charon Asetoyer

# A COMMUNITY IN COLLABORATION

The use of rape as a weapon of war against Native women began with the first contact with European colonists — and the creation of Indian boarding schools was a major accelerant.

From 1860 to 1978, the United States government forced thousands of Native children to attend these “federal schools,” which it created as a tool to “assimilate” Indian tribes. Physical abuse was commonplace in many of these schools, and the echoes of this abuse still resonate today — as academics and community leaders alike grapple with the long-term impact of pervasive violence on the health of later generations. One recent study found that former boarding school attendees and people raised by former attendees all faced increased rates of mental health challenges. Today, sexual abuse is alarmingly prevalent in the Native community.

“These are things we have encountered along the way. We’ve had to stop and acknowledge and know why we have such a high rate of abuse in our communities,” says Charon.



**“It can take a couple months to a year for a family to be ready to move to their own place, and housing on the reservation is tight and expensive.”**

**Waylon Houseman**  
Native American Community Board

These issues reach many Native communities, and NACB is working to build and maintain a cooperative network of partnerships that can help more women get the services and support they need, whether they’re in Lake Andes or hours away.

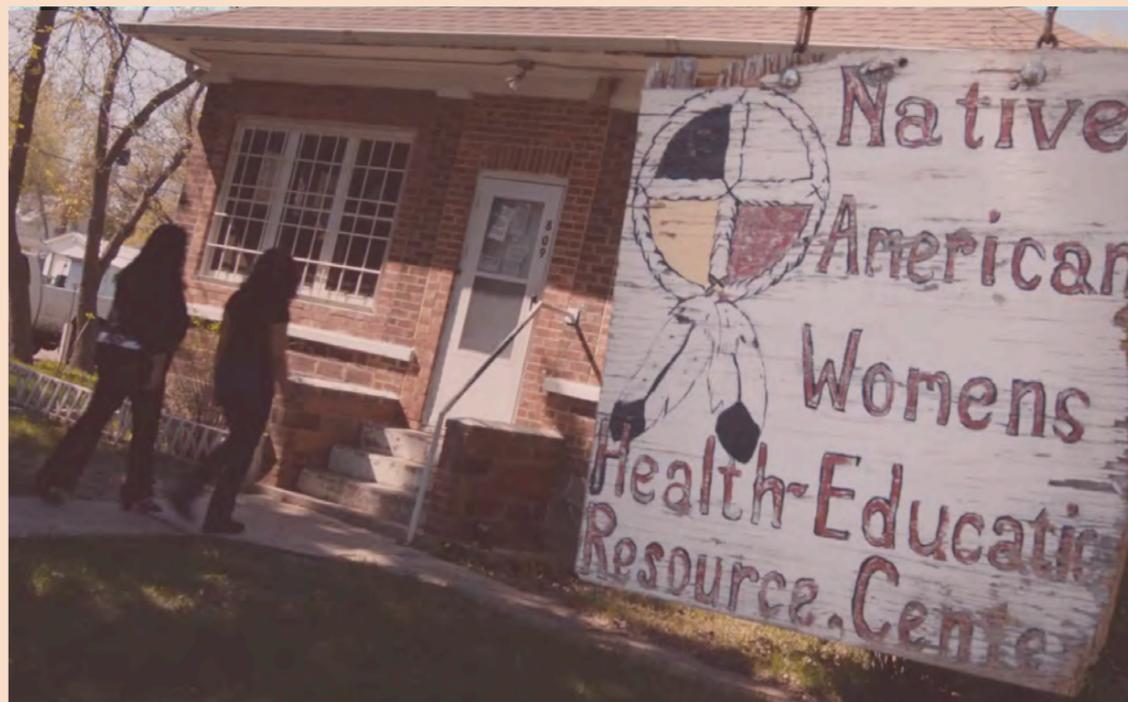
Waylon Houseman, director of the NACB women’s shelter, attends statewide trainings and conferences to network and build cooperative use of resources among organizations working to support survivors of domestic abuse or sexual assault. Through those connections, he works with all Native and non-Native shelters in the state to procure safe living situations for more women.

The NACB shelter is its own building, where up to 15 women and children can stay. A few blocks away, next to the police station, is NACB’s transitional house for women leaving the shelter. “We raised the money through philanthropic sources so we now own four two-bedroom units in transitional property,”

says Waylon. “A family can stay for 18 months. It can take a couple months to a year for a family to be ready to move to their own place, and housing on the reservation is tight and expensive.”

Though the NACB shelter is one of only a few in South Dakota with the ability and resources to transport women who might need to move to other shelters for safety reasons, shelters with fewer resources are able to take advantage of the infrastructure and network the NACB program has built.

As is true in many tribal communities, issues of legal jurisdiction can also be a common issue when working through domestic abuse cases here — some of Yankton is under federal jurisdiction, and some is state. NACB builds partnerships with law enforcement and other elements of the legal system to help provide understanding of the jurisdictional issues, along with training in cultural sensitivity.



Health Education Resource Center

These partnerships get results. Waylon and other NACB staff built a relationship with the tribal court, and that outreach convinced the court to take a stance in helping to end domestic violence. The Yankton tribal judge is now court-ordering women to create a safety plan to prepare for an abrupt leave from their abuser. An advocate sets up a meeting with NACB shelter staff, who then help prepare an exit strategy. These exit plans are vital in helping women be ready to leave when they need to and find stability in their lives after they make that choice. As with everything it does, NACB is compiling data on the effectiveness of this strategy.

As we sit around the table in the NACB house, our meeting comes to a close. Charon's right hand rests on the stack of reports she calls sacred. Outside, beyond the green leaves of the trees shading the window, is the women's shelter. Food has arrived at the table for us to share. Shavonne Bohannon is in the next room doing her job as on-air radio host. Over the airwaves we hear a public service announcement in both Dakota and English encouraging community members to stay off meth. Charon persuades both of us who have come to interview her to let her interview us for her own radio program. We understand on a very personal level how she builds networks and garners information to help her people.



Yankton Sioux Reservation

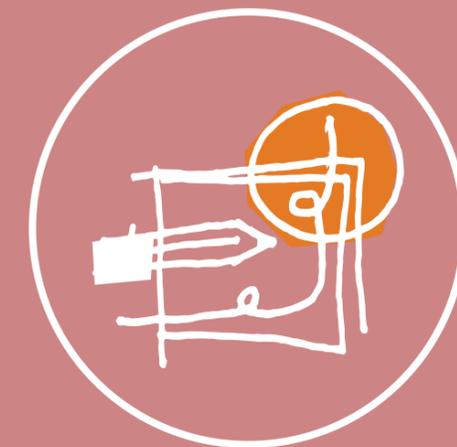


Native American Community Board Offices

CHARACTERISTIC

No

3



RESOURCEFUL

**HOW CAN SMALLER ORGANIZATIONS GET THE MOST FROM WHAT CAN BE LIMITED FINANCIAL RESOURCES?**

"Native Americans are quite resourceful and used to making their resources stretch. We apply that experience and put our heads together to come up with ways to meet new challenges — including operating with limited resources. We often turn to the community for volunteers and donations, including when organizing annual events like our Take Back The Night Walk or our Dakota Language Program."

**Charon Asetoyer**

Native American Community Board