

We Need More than Roadblocks

The Pandemic on the Pine Ridge Reservation

Marian White Mouse

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What is a reservation? Share what you know about the history of reservations and how we came to have them in the U.S.
2. What might be effective about roadblocks in and out of a community during a pandemic? What might the challenges be to maintaining them?

We Need More Education

When the pandemic first started, the tribe set up roadblocks into and out of the reservation. The roadblocks worked at first. They stopped people from bringing Covid onto the reservation. And they also worked to make sure people were only leaving the reservation for something essential—like going to the doctor or going grocery shopping.

But we need more than roadblocks. We need better systems for taking care of people. And we need to educate people about how to stay safe. The Covid team on the reservation isn't really helping people. When you call the hotline, you

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shopping lists. I buy what they need and box it up and leave it on their doorstep. Sometimes the tribe hands out applications for free fuel, but not everyone gets it. I make copies of the application and bring it out to people who live at the outer reaches of the reservation. This old man I visited said if

just get more numbers to call, and no one answers at those numbers. They are not distributing food and medicine to people who need it. I know this because people call me with their



Marian White Mouse delivers food to her uncle on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

the tribe helps me by giving me free propane, this will be the first time I ever got any help. He was practically crying when he said it.

We Need Less Fear

We also need less fear. Some of the Lakota medicine men act like Covid is a death sentence. The fear of the sickness is taking over. Even the little babies are aware of the sickness, and they're scared. We shouldn't have this fear. We should educate people and teach them safe practices instead of feeding the fear.

One reason Covid is spreading on our reservation is that most of our people are suffering from alcohol and drug addiction. In my opinion,

our lives are easy compared to what our ancestors went through. But we still sedate ourselves. We make excuses. We blame our historical traumas.

I'm a survivor of boarding schools. I went through all the beatings. It never occurred to me to pick up drugs and alcohol to survive. I've seen the destruction it causes. I've seen my mom bury her brothers. My dad is the only one left in his family. When I saw my parents cry from losing family members to alcohol, it made me not want to use it.

I Am Practicing the Lakota Way

Most of my life, I've been volunteering to help people in any way they need – food drives, blanket drives, clothing drives. I utilize myself in whatever way I can because I am able to. Now, I try to help families who have the virus. People think I have some sort of official job because I check on people and get them what they need. I use my own money. I am still leading ceremonies. Ceremony is a form of traditional healing. We have adapted our ceremony to be safe during the pandemic. We keep people six feet apart. We wear masks and pass out bottles of hand sanitizer. We try to feed people – which is itself healing.



The Oglala Lakota (and other Native American tribes) have their own sovereign nation within the United States. Share what you know about this and research it further to learn more.



Marian White Mouse (above with her husband) is a member of the Oglala Sioux tribe. She lives on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. She was educated in reservation schools and got a degree in counseling. She is currently working on her Lakota Studies teaching certificate.

During Covid, it's been hard to get the fresh vegetables and other healthy food that we need. During ceremonies, we try to give everyone a hearty healthy meal. That might be their main meal for the week.

I am practicing the Lakota way. This pandemic is causing a lot of destruction, but I am helping to keep our ceremonies alive and I am helping to keep our people alive.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what does her community need to better respond to the pandemic?
2. How is the author helping to keep people alive?
3. Look up Pine Ridge Reservation and learn about its history. Report back what you learn.
4. Read more about Indigenous Peoples in Issue #48 of *The Change Agent*.

