



# news release

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Wellmark Foundation Grant to Support Wellness and Prevention Curriculum for Lakota Elementary Students in South Dakota**

**(Des Moines, Iowa)** – Catholic Social Services in Rapid City, S.D., will use a \$50,000 two-year grant from The Wellmark Foundation to support a wellness and prevention curriculum for elementary students living on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in South Dakota.

Lakota Circles of Hope is an innovative, culturally specific curriculum that will teach 800-1000 second through fifth grade students how to live a healthy lifestyle based on their Lakota tradition and values, says Jim Kinyon, executive director of Catholic Social Services. “The curriculum was designed to use the power of the Lakota culture to positively transform the lives of reservation youth. It will teach students how their traditional Lakota values of respect, generosity, fortitude, wisdom and bravery can help them make safe and healthy choices.

According to Kinyon, the program will also offer knowledge and resources on how to resist peer pressure, abstain from substance abuse and avoid violence. In addition, program staff will work with community providers, parents and leaders to host summer camps and community-based events to reinforce the content of the classroom-based curriculum.

Lakota Circles of Hope was developed as a collaborative project involving Lakota elders, education professionals and Catholic Social Services staff. The long-term goals of the project are to reduce unhealthy and socially risky behaviors among Lakota youth, to increase awareness and acceptance of the Lakota identity, and to strengthen community and generational relationships.

Lakota Circles of Hope was awarded a four-year, \$330,284 Local Funding Partnerships grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and a three-year, \$210,213 grant from The Bush Foundation. This Wellmark Foundation grant will provide matching funds to leverage these grant awards. For more information on Lakota Circles of Hope, contact Jim Kinyon at [jkinyon@rapidnet.com](mailto:jkinyon@rapidnet.com) or (605) 348-6086.

The Wellmark Foundation has provided nearly \$16.3 million to fund 412 health-related grants in Iowa and South Dakota since 1997, including \$593,558 this cycle. “The Wellmark Foundation works to improve the health of Iowans and South Dakotans,” says Matthew McGarvey, director of The Wellmark Foundation. “Lakota Circles of Hope provides a unique opportunity to make a significant impact on Lakota youth. The wellness and prevention program will educate students

about making healthy choices through Lakota culture and teachings, which will ultimately lead to healthier, stronger youth.”

The Wellmark Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation created by Wellmark, Inc., doing business as Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa. The Foundation is offering two new grant programs in 2009. The **Growing Up LEAN: Living to be Energetic, Active, and Nutrition Grant Program** supporting childhood obesity prevention projects has an application deadline of April 21, 2009. The deadline for the **Healthy Communities Grant Program: Supporting a Culture of Wellness and Prevention** supporting community-based wellness and prevention projects is September 3, 2009. Visit The Wellmark Foundation's Web site at [www.wellmark.com/foundation](http://www.wellmark.com/foundation) for grant application instructions as well as a list of previous grant recipients. Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield and The Wellmark Foundation are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.