

# Indian Country Today

May 16, 2007

## Lulyahan Oti Women's Shelter Opens on Pine Ridge

By David Melmer

KYLE, S.D. – The much-awaited May 4 opening of the new women's shelter on the Pine Ridge Reservation May 4 drew large crowds to celebrate the new facility and the domestic violence program that is the backbone of change against domestic violence.

The new shelter, built by Cangleska Inc., is a model shelter for Indian country, much like the domestic violence program that covers the Pine Ridge Reservation. Lulyahan Oti, as the new shelter was named, will house up to 36 women and their children and provide them with a safe and comfortable facility.

The women and children will find a fully equipped kitchen, a well-lit dining room, a play room for kids stocked with toys, laundry facilities and a living area with a large, flat screen TV. Women and their children will be cared for in a bright and cheery environment.

“This is absolutely lovely,” said Karen Artichoker, co-director of Cangleska.

“No shelter can replace a home. This will be good for women's self-esteem,” she said.

Julie Shot to Pieces, from Wounded Knee, agreed. “This is amazing. It made me cry. This will build self-esteem. Whoever did this is amazing: they have a heart.”



David Melmer  
Indian Country –

Former Oglala Sioux Tribal President and noted women's rights proponent Cecelia Fire Thunder gave the keynote address at the open house for Lulyahan Oti, a new shelter on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation operated by Cangleska Inc.



(Bottom Photo) – The living quarters for women and their families at Lulyahan Oti, the new shelter operated by Cangleska Inc., try to provide a bright and cheery environment for residents.

Ten years ago, Cangleska opened its first shelter in a building given to the program by the tribe. The facility was full the day it opened. The new shelter, opened after the addition of many programs for women, men and families, is a symbol of how far the fight to end domestic violence has come.

More than 20 years ago, Bernice Swallow Stone organized volunteers who could shelter female victims of domestic violence.

Swallow Stone was honored as a special guest during the open house ceremony for Lulyahan Oti. She was credited with starting the Sacred Shawl Women's Society more than 20 years ago.

"It is sad we have to have a shelter. Men are still being violent," said Debbie White Plume, Swallow Stone's daughter, speaking on her mother's behalf.

The new shelter and the programs to educate men and women would not be possible without the help of the tribal government. Pine Ridge's domestic violence code, the first and the strongest of its kind in Indian country, mandates the arrest of perpetrators and gives the tribal court the authority to order perpetrators to attend Cangleska's men's rehabilitation program for one year. At least one-half of the people who attended the open house celebration were men.

"The dream has come true today," said Oglala Sioux Tribal President John Steele. Steele, in a previous term as president, supported Cangleska.

"I will also support them in the future. There were a lot of abusers and a lot that have turned around. I congratulate them for learning to respect women," Steele said.

Steele blamed colonization for putting men in roles they didn't understand, a movement that turned men away from being warriors and providers.

"They took a lot away from us," Steele said.

The colonization effect came to the Lakota later than many tribes; and that, according to Cecelia Fire Thunder, a Cangleska employee and the keynote speaker at the celebration, puts the Oglala people closer to who they really are.

"After one hundred fifty years of colonization, we are still this close to who we are," she said.

"In 1989 we were talking about this; the Lakota were the first to talk about it."

More than 20 years ago, the question was brought up during a meeting with male elders about whether it was part of the culture to be violent. The answer was no, Fire Thunder said.

"The reason the Oglalas succeeded is because we had the support of our men," Fire

Thunder said.

“The old men gave us permission to move ahead. They had relatives who fought at the Little Bighorn and at Wounded Knee.”

Many of the people who work with the Cangleska program are Sun dancers and pipe carriers, and most people claim that is why attitudes have changed.

“We are becoming more Lakota and less colonized,” Fire Thunder said. “We are that close to the past.”

### **The Cangleska Family at a Glance**

The day in which Cangleska Inc.’s new women’s shelter is turned over for use as a day care facility or a boys and girls club, and all advocates who work with women who are victims of violence lose their jobs, will be a good day, advocates claim.

Until then, however, the shelter is available to provide a comfortable environment for women and their children to find safety from violence.

Cangleska, an organization that provides domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy and related services to citizens of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, celebrated the opening of a new women’s shelter on the Pine Ridge Reservation May 4.

The new 7,800-square-foot shelter, called Lulyahan Oti, will house up to 36 women and children. Cost of the new shelter and an adjoining maintenance facility was more than \$1.4 million, funded with grants from USDA Rural Development, Medicine Root District, All Tribes Foundation, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Jane Fonda, the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Rosanne Barr Foundation, Native American Bank, V-Day and Eve Ensler.

The labor force that built Lulyahan Oti was 98 percent American Indian; the general contractor was Hahn’s Construction.

Lulyahan Oti replaces an older, now empty shelter, a building donated to Cangleska by the Oglala Sioux Tribe that opened April 1, 1997.

In the past year, Cangleska has sheltered 421 women and 483 children. Nearly 1,900 women and children received services from Cangleska in the past year and advocates responded to more than 800 crisis calls. The majority of the women receiving services were between the ages of 25 and 59. Most all children were between the ages of infancy and 6 years.

Cangleska also operates the Ohitika Najin Win Oti (Standing Strong Woman House) shelter in Rapid City, which has a large Native population.

Sacred Circle, a national resource center that provides training, consultation and

technical assistance to programs in Indian country, is operated by Cangleska. A legal advocacy program, Stronghold, is also located in Rapid City.

Smoke Signals, also part of the Cangleska family, monitors the response from law enforcement, the court systems and other advocacy systems that work to end violence against women.

Copyright © 2007 Indian Country Today.