

CHEYENNE RIVER YOUTH PROJECT

BUSH PRIZE FOR COMMUNITY INNOVATION



EAGLE BUTTE, SOUTH DAKOTA

LEADER

Julie Garreau

BUDGET

\$1M – \$4,999,999

GEOGRAPHY

South Dakota,
Native Nations

YEARS ACTIVE

Founded in 1988

INNOVATION STORY NO. 6

GRAND POSSIBILITIES

Born from a desire to transform a notorious main street bar into a drug- and alcohol-free space for the community's youth, the Cheyenne River Youth Project (CRYP) has become an essential part of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, providing safe places for 4- to 18-year olds to gather, and for teens to learn valuable employment and life skills.

STORY BY KEN STEINKEN AND
MORGAN MERCER

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— JULIE GARREAU, CRYP

INNOVATION

CHEYENNE RIVER YOUTH PROJECT

CRYP not only provides safe spaces for children ages 4–18, it also provides a venue for teens to learn valuable employment and life skills.

BREAKTHROUGH



To tackle the lack of opportunity for youth on the Cheyenne River Reservation, CRYP created an internship program that focuses on mentoring and soft skills to prepare students for success no matter what job they find. CRYP designed its approach based on what students asked for and wanted.



EQUIPPING TEENS FOR LIFE

CRYP is a reflection of the Lakota community it serves. When the nonprofit needs guidance, it looks to the kids who walk through its doors every day, or pulls from the experience of staff members who grew up on the reservation. Their expertise determines how CRYP evolves.



MAKING DO

When CRYP found itself strapped for cash, it relied on creativity and unique local fundraisers to keep its doors open. Even as the organization grew, Julie and her staff continued to think like a small-budget operation to ensure CRYP could always support its mission, even through the ebb and flow of outside support.



REFRAMES RISK



VALUES INCLUSIVITY



FOSTERS CREATIVITY

EVEN AS A SEVENTH GRADER,

Julie Garreau knew something was missing from her hometown of Eagle Butte, South Dakota. The closest movie theater or bowling alley was over an hour away, after-school activities were all but nonexistent and jobs were tough to come by. As a kid, she played outside, lay in the grass and tagged along with her mom to work. Outside of that, there wasn't much to do. When she returned home after college, little had changed. Her town still didn't have a youth center or safe space where kids could spend their evenings. So Julie partnered with the community to build one.

Since opening in 1988, CRYP has expanded from a single building—a renovated bar formerly known as the Little Brown Jug—to a campus so expansive it covers nearly six and a half acres. CRYP, located in the heart of the impoverished Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, is now a nationally recognized organization for Lakota youth.

“These kids know so much, but they’re not necessarily given all the tools,” says Julie, the executive director of CRYP. “Everything I’ve done to build the organization is a reflection of what I’ve seen in the community, what I’ve heard from the kids or what I experienced myself. People thrive in environments that encourage them to thrive.”

Take Joseph White Eyes. Julie knew him since he was a kid. He grew up at CRYP. He showed up each morning when the center opened, and stayed until it closed. He ate his meals there, got his Christmas presents from CRYP and even went through a rebellious phase with Julie. Today, the 22-year-old is touring the country as an advocate and activist for the water movement. He even ran 2,000 miles from North Dakota to Washington, DC, to protest and meet with government officials about the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

“Without the Cheyenne River Youth Project I probably wouldn’t be in college now,” says Joseph. “I probably wouldn’t be employed,

or have traveled and seen the world. CRYP brought in international volunteers to expose us to the outside world. I really took that into my heart because they offered me so much and I just wanted to give back.”

The kids who call the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation home experience some of the highest poverty rates in the country. That kind of economic hardship is often accompanied by other challenges: gangs, addiction, suicide, teen pregnancy and abuse. But CRYP creates opportunities that lift kids out of those situations. When Julie visited the high school and asked students what they wanted to see at CRYP’s new campus, they asked for classrooms, computer labs, libraries and art studios. Today the youth have a sprawling teen center, an innovative internship and job training program, a 2.5-acre garden and an art park that welcomes graffiti artists. Through each event or program it hosts, CRYP widens the realm of possibilities for kids living on the reservation, giving them the support they need to choose a different path forward.



REFRAMES RISK: Traditional Lakota values—like a respect for the land—influence CRYP’s contemporary programming. Today, the organization boasts a 2.5-acre garden plot that produces enough vegetables to supply several farmers markets and a vigorous canning operation. The massive social enterprise project started out with simple roots though. “It goes back to listening and seeing what’s happening in front of you,” says Julie. “One kid threw garbage [on the ground] and I thought, ‘I’ve got to get them to stop that.’ I wanted my kids to understand what the dirt could do for them. I wanted them to get their hands dirty and watch something grow.” Julie didn’t even know how to garden, but with one calculated risk she took an opportunity to grow her small vision about how to connect students with the land into one of CRYP’s largest programs.

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THERE ARE A LOT OF CHALLENGES HERE... BUT DON'T LET THAT BE THE ONLY THING YOU SEE.

— JULIE GARREAU, Cheyenne River Youth Project

Equipping Teens for Life



Tammy Granados is CRYP's youth programs director. Ten years ago, she was another high school student at the teen center. She played midnight basketball and even received a prom dress donated through CRYP's Passion for Fashion event. What CRYP still lacked when she was a student, however, was an internship program.

"Our youth aren't always fortunate enough to have positive guidance and encouragement. Realizing your potential and finding your way gets difficult," says Tammy.

"I grew up in similar situations and hardships. I think back on the conversations that would have been beneficial to me and ask: 'How can we address that?'"

For Tammy, the internship program CRYP launched in 2013 encompassed everything she wished someone had taught her back in school. The organization's current students echoed her sentiment. When Julie first visited the local high school in 2001 to share CRYP's plans to build a new campus, the kids asked for a classroom where they

could learn skills like balancing a checkbook. For years, Julie had observed that the reservation workforce lacked some of the basic skills she looked for in an employee. So CRYP decided to get proactive and train the youth in the community to be the kind of employees it hoped to hire one day.

“If you really want to understand a community and what’s happening, spend some time with some kids,” says Julie. “They just see it like it is. They became my teachers. When I paid attention to the kids it helped me realize what I needed to do to guide the program.”

As CRYP staff members reflected on what it was like for them growing up in the community, they realized the kids needed an internship program that went beyond teaching specific job skills like tending a garden or working as a barista. Instead, CRYP’s program also had to dig into soft skills—building healthy relationships, time and stress management, personal wellness and financial literacy—that helped teens hang onto a job once they were hired.

“Preparing them for work life and all that comes with it is pretty important,” says Julie. “If people can’t function in a healthy manner, it’s going to have an impact on everything.”

In the program’s second year, 50 teens applied for 10 positions. Nearly two years later, 142 teens had completed CRYP’s 80-hour internship program. Originally, each teen earned a \$500 stipend once they completed the program, but staff started to notice that in practice this model didn’t fit the kids as well as they had hoped. For some of the students, life circumstance outside of their control prevented them from finishing the full 80 hours—and from receiving any money.

“That’s disappointing for the kids. They’re pretty fragile. Not that we were doing anything wrong before, but we wanted to acknowledge them for making some headway,” says Julie. “The kids are still learning, so we should give them credit for what they learned.”

In 2017, CRYP changed the program to resemble an a la carte menu. The organization attached a dollar amount to each class the kids could take. Students still needed to participate in the full length of the cohort—either two or three months—but at the end if they only completed 60 hours, students still earned part of their stipend based on the classes they finished.



VALUES INCLUSIVITY: Julie constantly reminds her staff that working with kids isn’t about reading a bunch of studies. Innovation happens when you watch, observe and engage with youth. Do you know what makes the kids laugh? What makes them sad? What gets them excited? When you know the answers to these questions, you can design programming that fits them better.

Making Do



The town called it the banana bread phenomenon. For nearly a decade, the local grocery store donated bins of browning bananas to CRYP. Community members pitched in flour and sugar, and with it CRYP staff members cranked out loaf after loaf. CRYP's legendary banana bread made a name for the group, and staff easily sold dozens of baked goods each week to construction crews and hungry residents.

"From the very beginning we had very little, so that's how we made money if we didn't have it," Julie says. "We took nothing for granted. We just hustled and worked."

A lack of money, especially in CRYP's earlier years, drove Julie and her staff to become more creative in finding resources to keep their programs running. At Halloween, Julie borrowed an old, stripped down ambulance from a friend. Her staff dressed up as ghouls and monsters and drove around blasting "Monster Mash" from the speakers. For \$15, CRYP staff would dance and deliver a plastic jack-o-lantern stuffed with candy.

As a small organization, those early years taught CRYP careful money management skills the nonprofit still puts into action today. Even now, when staff bring Julie a purchase order,

she asks: Did you check for the best price? Do we already have this? Would our money be better spent somewhere else? That frugality was driven in part by a commitment Julie gave the kids when she first launched CRYP: to be the one safe space they could always count on.

“Once you make a promise to your kids, you can’t break it, especially in a community like ours,” says Julie. “You’ve got to be here tomorrow and a year from now, so you have to be careful that you don’t upset that basket. We grew as we had money to grow.”

To bolster its sustainability, CRYP continued to think like a small-budget operation, even as the organization grew larger. Julie wanted to make sure that CRYP learned how to survive and keep its doors open without the help of big bank loans that would be hard to pay back, or grants that might only support the organization for a few years. Every dollar that flowed into the organization received the utmost respect from Julie and her staff. Because they never had a lot, they were always practical, smart and careful with the money they received.

In 2008, that attitude helped CRYP withstand a major blow when the organization lost a substantial portion of its funding. “It was devastating,” says Julie. The unexpected loss

overwhelmed her. As the executive director, she didn’t know what to do; but, instead of sitting in her office and wringing her hands, Julie decided to take her staff bowling and out to eat.

“Sometimes you have to hold it together. It’s okay to step back and take a minute. You may not have an answer, but you can go do something with your staff,” says Julie. “When you lose funding like that, it’s not like you can say, ‘Oh, I found it today.’ It’s more about finding your resolve that you’re going to find a solution.”

After Julie broke the news to her staff, she saw her team double down on its commitment to the organization’s mission and go to new lengths to find local fundraising opportunities to fill the gap. The added pressure forced CRYP to kick its creativity into overdrive and invest in innovative programs it originally planned to roll out five years down the line. CRYP devoted more energy to its social enterprise work by opening a campus gift store stocked with local products, and by ramping up its farmers market and canning program.

“Money won’t fix what happened here,” says Julie. “We needed to fix what happened here. A lack of resources made us stronger.”



FOSTERS CREATIVITY: Creative tactics like these weren’t just about turning ripe fruit into moneymaking opportunities. Fundraising also gave Julie and her staff a reason to remind the community that CRYP was still around and to raise awareness for its work. On days CRYP staff dressed up in costumes and toured the town, the community came alive. People got excited to see what crazy thing Julie’s team would do next. These fundraising strategies may have been time consuming, but it showed people in the community that CRYP wanted to invest in them, too. For a small community like the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, that’s important to see.

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— JULIE GARREAU, Cheyenne River Youth Project



STAFF, Cheyenne River Youth Project

COKATA WICONI TEEN CENTER
Cheyenne River Youth Project



COKATA WICONI TEEN CENTER
Cheyenne River Youth Project





TAMMY GRANADOS
Cheyenne River Youth Project



WANIYETU WOWAPI ART PARK
Cheyenne River Youth Project