



The First 50 Years of Oglala Sioux Housing

The First Indian Housing Authority in the United States





OGLALA SIOUX (LAKOTA) HOUSING'S FIRST 50 YEARS*

In 2011, the Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing celebrated fifty years of providing housing on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. In 1961, it became the first Indian housing authority in the country as well as the first housing authority of any kind in South Dakota. Initially, Housing was established by the Oglala Sioux Tribe to receive tribal housing funds under the federal government's 1937 U.S. Housing Act. The 1937 Housing Act had been a major source of low-income housing assistance in the United States since the era of the New Deal; however, there had never been any public housing for Indian reservations under that program. But in 1961 a legal opinion by the U.S. Public Housing Administration and an Executive Order from President John F. Kennedy, as promised by Kennedy during his 1960 Campaign, were issued making federally recognized tribes eligible to participate in the public housing program. The federal government had in part been prodded to take this important action by the Oglala Sioux Tribe. The Oglala Sioux Housing Authority, Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing's predecessor, was quickly formed by the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council making it a first in the United States and the first housing authority in South Dakota.

The impetus for the tribal government to push for expansion of public housing and to then move forward with the formation of the housing authority was two-fold. First it was the presence of visionary tribal leaders. The most important was Johnson Holy Rock, the then two-term Tribal President and later Chairman of the Oglala Sioux Housing Authority. Helping him was the Tribe's Washington, D.C. attorney, Dick Schifter. Tribal leaders were especially keen to improve living conditions on the reservation for everyone. Secondly, a great many Oglala Sioux World War II and Korean War veterans, like John Holy Rock, had returned to the reservation with high expectations and a belief that they and other tribal members were entitled to "decent, safe and sanitary" housing.

Oglala tribal leaders proceeded to push for better houses with no other tribal examples or precedent to guide them. The following history recognizes these leaders and includes information gathered in recent interviews with some of the tribal members who were involved in developing the Oglala Sioux Housing Authority and its very first homes. This history also includes thoughts and comments from others who are currently involved with housing at Pine Ridge.

The original tribal ordinance creating the Housing Authority provided for a Housing Board, a Director (an "Executive Director"), a general legal counsel, and as many employees as deemed necessary for its operations. The initial meeting of the first Board was held on July 17, 1961. At the beginning, the Tribe and the Housing Board worked through the Chicago Public Housing Administration Office. The Denver Regional Housing Office became the primary federal office for Housing to work only after its formation in 1970.

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In its dealings with federal housing officials in the early 60's, Housing encountered few federal government and private sector attorneys, planners, and housing development and management personnel knowledgeable of tribal organizations to assist the Tribe and the Housing Authority in its efforts. However, Tribal attorney Dick Schifter, architect Irv Dana and contractor Glenn Barber all from the private sector played important roles at Pine Ridge in those early years. By the early 70's, the U.S. Department for Housing and Urban Development, the successor to the Public Housing Administration, formed new Regional Offices in Denver, San Francisco, Seattle and Minneapolis and they soon contained specialists experienced in tribal programs. At this point the Indian housing program began to roll.

The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation

The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is the second largest Indian reservations in the country. While there is some dispute as to numbers, there is general agreement that the current reservation population exceeds 40,000 residents with a land area in excess of 11,000 square miles in four South Dakota counties (Shannon, Fall River, Custer and Jackson). The Tribe and State disagree whether a fifth county (Bennett) should be once again included within Reservation boundaries. However, Bennett County also has a large Indian population and the County Commissioner who has received the most votes in several recent elections, Newton Cummings, resides in the county and is a past Tribal President and former Housing Authority Chairman.

The Housing program on the Pine Ridge reservation is currently organized into nine districts: Pine Ridge, White Clay/Oglala, Wounded Knee/Manderson, Kyle, Wanblee, Martin, Allen, Porcupine, and Wakpamni. Other communities on the reservation, such as Red Shirt, receive their housing assistance through these districts.

In terms of economic development, there is very little in the way of minerals or timber. Ranching and cattle operations however are the main sources of income for the residents. While located only a few hours away from major tourist attractions in the Black Hills as well as the famous Bad Lands, very little tourist traffic makes it to the reservation. The Tribe recently built and now operates a casino, which it hopes will make some difference.

The reservation was once part of the Great Sioux Reservation which was created by the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie with the United States. The original boundaries included the Black Hills and all of western South Dakota. Much of this land was then lost by the Sioux tribes in a series of actions taken by the U.S. government. By 1889 the Great Sioux Reservation was reduced to five reservations and the land areas were greatly diminished. Strong sentiment persists that the Black Hills, ancestral homeland to the Oglala Band as well as to other nearby Sioux or Lakota bands, is sacred ground and this underscores Oglala belief that the Black Hills "are not for sale" and should be returned to the tribes.



Beginning The First Tribal Housing Program

In undertaking the first federally funded Indian housing program in the country, the Oglala Tribal Council had to make a determination that there was a housing need on the reservation that could be served through federal housing programs and then decide how that need should be met. This resulted in the formation of a housing authority. The Tribal Council did that in Tribal Ordinance No. 61-41 at a Council meeting on July 13, 1961. Of the 29 Council Members at that time, 24 were present that day, 20 voting in favor and 4 against. Some of the Tribal Council officers present on that occasion were Johnson Holy Rock, President; Lloyd Eagle Bull, Secretary; Zona Pourier, Treasurer; and Enos Poor Bear. Leslie P. Towle also participated in the meeting as the U. S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) reservation Superintendent. The Ordinance has been revised several times over the years with the entity ultimately being renamed Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing. Tribal government officials who were involved in the 60's included: Wilbert Black Feather, Tribal President; Gerald One Feather, Louis Her Many Horses, and Hilda L. Horncloud.

The Ordinance provided for a five member Housing Authority Board to determine what kind of housing was needed and to oversee the Authority. The original five Members appointed to the Housing Authority Board were Samuel Stands, Chairman; William Whirlwind Horse, Vice Chairman; Peter Cummings, Secretary; Albert Dale, Treasurer; and Mr. Towles, ex officio, as BIA Superintendent. Shortly after its formation, the Housing Authority Board was temporarily enlarged to eight members. Members of the Housing Authority during these formative years of the 1960's also included Emil Tidditts, Hobart Keith, Duane Moxon, John E. Jorenby and Llewellyn Kingsley.

Housing on the reservation in 1961 was not only in short supply, but what did exist was woefully inadequate in terms of living space, good water, sanitary facilities and the availability of effective maintenance programs. Several current residents who were living on the reservation have in recent interviews affirmed that much of the housing consisted of "tar paper shacks" occupied by two or three families.

In order to develop housing on the reservation, the new Housing Authority had to deal with several different federal agencies including not only the BIA and the Indian Health Service (IHS) but also the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD assumed the role of the former Public Housing Administration and administers all public housing assistance on the reservation. Land status within the reservation's boundaries continued to pose issues for housing development. While much of the land was, and still is today, held in "trust" for the Tribe by the BIA, from time-to-time there were other federal land initiatives including Trust lands "allotted" for use by individual tribal members. publicly assisted housing on many allotments when the heirs could not agree on who should occupy that housing.

The creation and issuing of allotments began on the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1904, under the Executive Order of July 29, 1904 and continued until 1923.



During allotment Tribal members over the age of eleven became eligible to receive a land parcel registered in his or her name and which could be transferred to that person's heirs. One of the unanticipated results of this particular allotment program was that several generations later many of those allotments are now registered in the names of dozens or even hundreds of "heirs," (a phenomenon known as fractionation) which barred efforts to provide publically assisted housing on many allotments when the heirs could not agree on who should occupy that housing.

The very nature of allotted trust land, while beneficial in terms of inhibiting the loss of land out of tribal jurisdiction, also means that land cannot involuntarily be separated from the particular family's ownership. The result has been that some private lenders had a further reason to not make loans to build or renovate a home on trust lands while others simply used trust status as an excuse to not finance housing. To further complicate matters, from time to time land within reservation boundaries was opened up by the federal government to non-Indian ownership, so that the Pine Ridge Reservation, like many other reservations, became a "checkerboard" of tribal trust land and individual allotments interspersed with considerable fee-land parcels. Trust land housing leases used to contain a limit to run for twenty-five years with "an option to renew." However that recently has been remedied and full fifty-year leases are now permitted under federal law.

Prior to the advent of public housing programs on Indian reservations, the only other housing program of any significance was the BIA Housing Improvement Program (HIP). The HIP program currently results in a small number of homes being made available each year compared with the HUD program which enabled the Tribe to develop housing on a much larger scale.

Working with the BIA, IHS and the Public Housing Administration/HUD

Starting in 1970, Denver HUD officials working closely with the Tribe and the Oglala Sioux Housing Authority have included William "Bill" Hallett (who later became BIA Commissioner in the Carter administration), Bob Leatherman and John Hempel, and Housing Specialist Arnold Nelson, to name a few and attorneys Jim Wagenlander, who now along with the law firm of Wagenlander & Heisterkamp, LLC represent Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing.

Eventually, HUD established regional Offices of Native American Programs (ONAP) in the 90's. The Denver office was headed by Vernon Haragara who has been succeeded by Randy Akers. In the early days there were many well intentioned federal housing officials interested in working with tribes, but it took some time and patience on the part of the Tribe to obtain results and the ONAP Office was of great help. In fact, at the beginning, the Chicago HUD office initially detailed a Mr. Heinzelman to the reservation to work with local officials after formation of the Housing Authority in 1961. Also Miles Tyler, who apparently was known as "Big Foot," was employed by Heinzelman to oversee the first local construction operations.



An important figure in the effort to include tribal governments under the 1937 Housing Act in 1960 and 1961 was Richard “Dick” Schifter, a Washington, D.C. attorney who represented the Oglala Sioux Tribe at the time. There is an historic photograph showing Johnson Holy Rock, Tribal Chairman; Marie C. McGuire, Public Housing Administration; and Mr. Schifter with President Kennedy in the Presidential Oval Office after President Kennedy issued his Executive Order approving public housing on reservations and awarding the first federal funds to a tribal housing authority.

Additionally, a great deal of invaluable assistance was provided from by local construction specialists, especially Rapid City contractor Glenn Barber, who remains active today by being a member of the Housing’s development staff. Barber for over fifty years headed up several companies, notably R & S Construction, that not only built housing on the Pine Ridge reservation and other reservations starting in the 1960’s, but also constructed schools, hospitals and BIA and IHS administrative facilities and structures. Another individual working with Housing at Pine Ridge in the early days was architect Irv Dana and then later his expanded architectural/engineering firm Dana, Larson and Rubal. A significant partner in that company who did much Indian housing work was architect, Dick Carr. Some important accounting assistance was provided in those early years by Arlo Smith. Also, Donald O. Flahart did the surveying for Housing and Buckingham Construction did some of the early construction as well.

One of the first business items that Housing had to do was to enter into land leases with the tribal government. The initial lease entered into for North Ridge, Project SD 1-1, was ultimately concluded on August 26, 1963. As the very first housing authority not only in Indian country but also in the State of South Dakota, the Oglala Sioux Housing Authority was given the numeric program designation of “SD 1” by the federal government (the SD standing for South Dakota and 1 being the first Indian housing authority).

The initial project on Pine Ridge became known as North Ridge and though 150 low rent units were envisioned, for that site, 40 were eventually completed. This was on a cluster site. Second leases between the tribal government and Housing was entered into on January 28, 1964 for Projects SD 1-2 and SD 1-3. Gilbert Ecoffey, currently the Development Coordinator for Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing, actually did much of the carpentry work for the homes in SD 1-1, including fabricating cabinets out of birch. Irv Dana was the architect.

Up until the mid-1990’s, there were three main programs administered by the Housing Authority. The first was a rental program. A “Mutual Help” home ownership program was shortly thereafter developed that allowed for public funding of homes on allotted or privately held trust parcels as well as tribal trust land. “Mutual Help” meant that all the participants in a particular project were expected to contribute work for the betterment on all the other owners in a project with the goal of keeping labor costs to a minimum. The third program was known as “Turnkey III” which was another home ownership program.



The legislation supporting the Public Housing Program underwent several major revisions over the years requiring Housing and other Indian housing agencies to make frequent changes in their management and rent collection policies. One of the most important changes was known as the “Brooke Amendment.” Sponsored in 1969 by Republican Senator Edward W. Brooke III of Massachusetts (a co-author of the 1968 Civil Rights Act), the Amendment limited for all public and Indian housing projects the amount of rent that could be collected from any renter or home buyer. Originally this amount was 25% of a tenant household’s adjusted income. This required periodic “recertification” of each renter’s or purchaser’s family income and caused tenant rents to fluctuate. Although the Amendment was well-intentioned, some believe that the result has been that Housing has had to spend an inordinate amount of time, energy and management funds to conduct these “recertifications.” In a recent HUD audit of Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing in September 2009, this was the only management finding mentioned. This indicates that the current Housing Board and staff have a firm control of their program and are meeting agency expectations but it also is an illustration of the complications still caused by the perpetuation of the Brooke Amendment rule.

Over the years Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing has worked with many other organizations and programs. Some federal, a few state and many private. This includes the Rural Development Council, Oglala Sioux Tribe Partnership for Housing, National American Indian Housing Council and the United Native American Housing Association.

Fifty Years of Housing

The first Executive Director for the Oglala Sioux Housing Authority was Yvonne Wilson assisted by her husband Dick Wilson, who later became Tribal President. He was head of maintenance. Popular opinion is that the second Housing Authority Executive Director, Gene Rooks, was significantly responsible for getting the program going after some initial difficulties. Rooks was an Army veteran, enrolled member of the Tribe (born in the Rosebud Hospital) and an experienced businessman fluent in the Oglala Sioux language. He served as Housing Authority Executive Director from the mid-sixties to mid-seventies and was particularly effective in working with some of the older members of the Tribe. Zona Rooks, Gene’s sister, was Treasurer of the Tribe at that time and had much to do with convincing him to move back to Pine Ridge and take the Housing Authority job in 1966. During those years, Nima (Carlow) DeLong served as Assistant Director and was responsible for many of the tenant support programs developed and placed in operation.

Ms. DeLong recalls that the Housing Authority had 250 homes at the commencement of her term of employment and there were 780 when she departed.

The Housing Authority suffered a major catastrophe in the late 60’s when it lost its office building and most of its tenant records in a fire.



In the first years of development, only rental units, but not home ownership programs, were developed by the Housing Authority. “Homemakers” were hired to go out into the housing communities and explain how to take care of a rental unit and the importance of paying rent. Unpaid rent and maintenance problems were large problems that Rooks and DeLong worked long hours to correct. Notwithstanding, the Housing Authority program was so popular that applications for admission to the Authority’s units steadily increased and required the Housing staff’s constant attention. The Housing Authority also handled BIA HIP funds, but those funds were at that time relegated strictly for repairs on non-Housing Authority units and not for new home construction.

In a close community as exists at Pine Ridge, evictions were always difficult to undertake, especially when involving family and relatives of important tribal officials. The Housing Authority in the 1960’s and early 1970’s was located in the North Ridge community and was staffed entirely by Rooks and DeLong with a maintenance man in Kyle and three or four other maintenance men working out of Pine Ridge.



Important Board Members during this time included, in addition to Johnson Holy Rock, Vincent Brewer, Vincent Two Lance, and Newton Cummings. Earl Neumeyer was also an active player in Housing’s program. Rooks mentioned that no one liked traveling to Chicago during those years and they were pleased when the Denver HUD Office opened. It was during Rooks’ tenure that Glenn Barber and his companies became involved with Housing. Board members Bill Cottierier was also very helpful as was Paul Apple. Rooks did not anticipate that he would be in charge of administering the Cohen Home for the elderly (Project SD 1-3) when he first assumed his duties as Housing Authority Executive Director, but managed to make that project work, in his estimation.



In 1973, Rooks and DeLong had to deal with the rampage occasioned by the Wounded Knee siege that lasted 72 days and resulted in a great deal of damage to housing units and tenant support services.

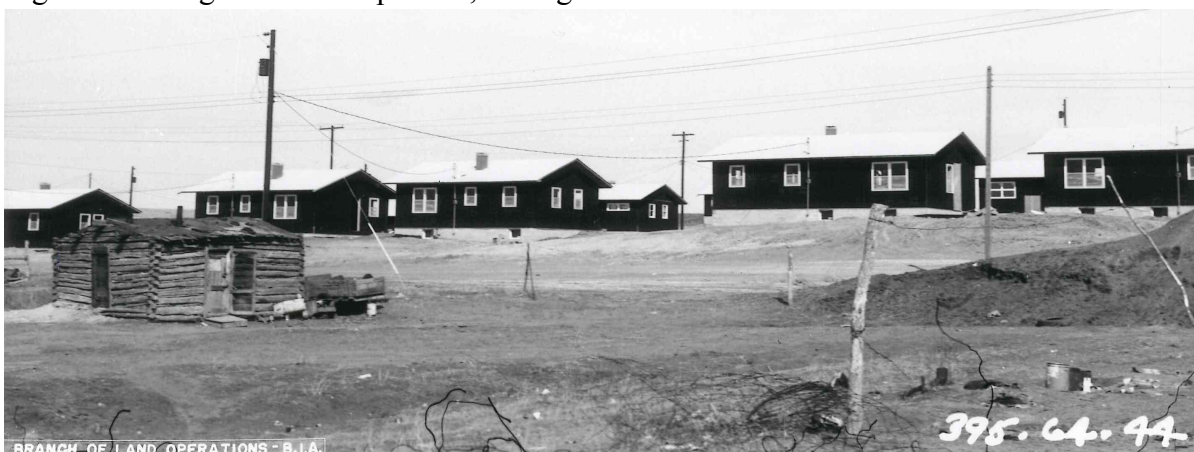
The Cherry Hill project for disabled (now also the elderly), was a challenge for Rooks and DeLong to manage. On the average, the most rent being paid in any of the projects was “\$89 month or \$49 a month” in the Cohen Home project. Housing at this point was only being developed in the communities of Pine Ridge, Kyle, Wounded Knee and Manderson.

After Rooks and DeLong departed to undertake other ventures on the reservation, Ace Richardson was hired as Housing’s Executive Director. Rooks went on to operate on the reservation a hardware store, a restaurant, a flower shop and a funeral home, evidencing his management versatility.

There then followed a period of time that saw a rapid turnover in staff resulting in problems in terms of maintenance and the accumulation of unpaid rent. The situation became more stable when Vince Brewer, once a member of the Housing Authority Board, was offered and accepted the position of Executive Director. Many recent personal accounts agree that under Brewer’s leadership, the housing program moved strongly ahead in the late 70’s.

Glenn Barber started his first Housing Authority project on the reservation with project SD 1-5. He earlier had built a school at Porcupine. At that time the Porcupine school had one native teacher but today about 85% of the school staff are native. The funds for the school (fifteen million dollars) had to be obtained by working through the BIA office in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which demonstrates the wide geographical range of federal agency locations which the Tribal government has had to deal with. It was on the school project in Porcupine that Barber first worked with Paul Iron Cloud, who is currently Chief Executive Officer of Housing.

Barber remembers using the first laser device in reservation construction to measure and level home sites. He believes that education is probably making the biggest positive impact on the reservation and during his early construction days there, he and Hank Frickey ordered job skill correspondence courses for workers. They would shut construction work down at 3:00 PM to let workers study course work leading to becoming certified carpenters, among other careers.



BRANCH OF LAND OPERATIONS - B.I.A.



Newton Cummings became more involved in the late 1970's through the 1980's through his service to the Tribe in many capacities, including President of the Tribe, as member of the Oglala College Board for over 35 years, and a Bennett County Commissioner for several terms. Cummings also at the same time took over as Housing Authority Chairman which he now avows is the best way to ensure good cooperation and communications between Housing and the Tribe.

Cummings is a proponent of what became known as "scattered site" construction. BIA, IHS and HUD from the start favored building on "clustered sites" because it reduced building costs in terms of doing lease surveys and installing water and sewer facilities. However, from the very beginning many Tribal leaders had serious concerns about clustering units. There was often opposition to "cluster site" homes because they led to crowding and putting different families that "did not get along" into homes near each other. These consequences are evident today and the early insistence in clustered housing has unfortunately had lasting effects.

Cummings found that renters also had difficulty understanding rent payment formulas and sent staff into homes to explain the tenants maintenance and rent paying responsibilities. This effort led to improved rent collection and also better home upkeep. During Cummings's tenure as Housing Authority Chairman, Darryl Twiss was the Housing Authority Executive Director and Jerry Matthews provided legal advice and later served as a Tribal Judge. Carmelita Richards was the main Financial Officer for the Housing Authority at this time. Twiss followed Ace Richardson as the Executive Director. Francis Gros Louis, a HUD management specialist in the Denver office, and Cummings established a good working relationship, which continues today in both of their retirements from public jobs.

From the original five-member Board, the Tribe expanded the Housing Board to nine members, one from each district. This lasted until 2007. Eleanor Charging Crow from Wanblee and Floyd White Eyes were very helpful Board Members, Cummings recalls.

Cummings observed that building on allotted trust lands was often time consuming in that some of the allotments involved 100 to 150 heirs of which a majority vote was needed in order to move ahead with construction on that site. He also found that HUD financial regulations changed often and were hard to keep up with, leading, at one time, to a temporary loss of HUD funds under its "modernization" program. "Modernization" was a special program providing funding to update HUD-funded housing.

When asked about the tri-agency agreement between HUD, IHS and the BIA, which underlies the manner in which the three federal agencies cooperate in tribal housing, Cummings described it as working "o.k.," although the IHS tended not to have a lot of money. Cummings persuaded HUD to allow the Housing Authority to put homes on deeded or allotted trust lands, which "helped a lot." A significant home ownership program also was started during his time as Housing Authority Chairman.

Newton Cummings also remembers Housing Authority funds being so scarce that on occasions Pat Garnett went to the local junkyard to find materials to repair homes. This also showed how devoted Garnett was to the housing program.



Cummings, like all other Housing Authority Board Members at the time, received no stipend as a Board Member to attend meetings and was only reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses. He believed that one of his major accomplishments was “overcoming HUD problems” and restarting the housing program on the reservation.

Ernie Little, who is presently the Development Coordinator for the Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing, recalls there was a huge interest in the original North Ridge SD 1-1 project and that the homes were filled as soon as they were completed. People moved in from places with nothing but dirt floors and no electric ovens or refrigerators, bathtubs or showers.

From the beginning, tenant counselors were hired to help tenants understand how to operate the appliances and maintain their houses. Little said in the very early years there were as many as twenty young men in carpenter classes at one time when working on housing projects.

Little emphasized that ancestral lands are important to families on the reservation and need to be carefully administered by agency personnel. There was criticism on the reservation that Housing was focusing too much on the Pine Ridge community and did not develop enough units in other reservation communities. It is also clear in Mr. Little’s mind that employment has “followed housing development” on the reservation in a positive way.

Along with Cassie Steel, Gilbert Ecoffey was one of the first tenants in the North Ridge Project SD 1-1, as well as being one of the principal carpenters who built the project. He remembers working on tiling there the day he heard over the radio in 1963 that President Kennedy had been shot and killed in Dallas. He moved into North Ridge and ultimately lived there for almost twelve years.



There was no general construction contractor on SD 1-1 and it was undertaken by what was known as a “force account,” process with the Housing Authority hiring and managing its own crews. Since there were not a lot of experienced carpenters at that time to do construction, some had to be trained on that job.



Ecoffey says it is much different now, largely due to all the housing construction on the reservation. Ecoffey figures he has worked for Housing “on and off” for over forty years.

Before Ecoffey moved into North Ridge with his wife and four kids they lived in a 10 ft. by 16 ft. shack that had a kitchen and one bedroom with an outside hand pump and no running water. At that time, North Ridge was considered the “ultimate housing” on the reservation because it had “city water” supplied by the IHS. He vividly remembers as a kid meeting Frank G. Wilson, the then Tribal President, who “wore a gun,” and this impressed him immensely at the time. SD 1-1 and its units still stand today and continue to house Pine Ridge families.

Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing Today

The federal Indian housing program changed dramatically in 1996 when the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA) was enacted. Federal Indian housing funding changed to a block grant program that recognized tribal self-determination. This is a more appropriate system to deliver HUD funds. The push for this new program had started a number of years earlier with The Committee to Save Indian Programs which was championed by Paul Iron Cloud, the current C.E.O. of Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing, and other Sioux leaders from across the Dakotas.

The current Housing Authority Board of Directors is comprised of only three members. They are Chairperson Emma (Pinky) Clifford, Taylor Little White Man, and Ivan Bettleyoun. Denise Mesteth also previously chaired this three person board. Reducing the Board to three members has significantly improved the governance and operation of Housing.

Tammy Eaglebull, born and raised in Porcupine, is one of Oglala Sioux Lakota Housing’s current private architects.





The Housing Authority over the years has been able to engage many dedicated, qualified personnel to manage its affairs. The present Housing staff, led by Paul Iron Cloud, managed to obtain two grants in 2009 from the Obama Administration out of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act economic stimulus program. In the Dakotas, only Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing and one other tribal housing agency received more than one grant from this funding. One grant was for \$4,000,000 and it came out of competitive funds. Housing also received \$4,300,000 out of non-competitive funds.

Mr. Iron Cloud has been the Chief Executive Officer of Housing since 2007 and previously held this position in the late 1990's. He also served two terms as President of the Tribe in addition to holding several other offices in the tribal government, including the Fifth Member of the Tribal Council. Mr. Iron Cloud estimates he has served the Tribe in some governmental capacity for over seventeen years, a record that maybe only Enos Poor Bear may be able to match.

Iron Cloud was persuaded to take this latest position with Housing in 2007 by several tribal leaders who believed Housing was experiencing severe problems and that he was the person to get it back on track. Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing had become the successor to Oglala Sioux Housing Authority by then. The Housing program not only provides most of the badly needed "decent, safe and sanitary" housing on the reservation, it also is a major economic factor on the reservation. Mr. Iron Cloud had to deal with a dispirited staff upon his return to Housing, which he promptly addressed by bringing in Doyle Pipe on Head as Assistant C.E.O. Other key staffing changes and promotions included Gilbert Ecoffey, Ernie Little, Glenn Barber, Jackie Gray, Christy Red Hair, Virgil Randall, Danielle Two Eagle and the return of Wagenlander & Heisterkamp, LLC as legal counsel.

The total Housing staff now exceeds 120 people and the annual budget runs over ten million dollars each year, not counting the 2009 Stimulus funds mentioned above.

Mr. Iron Cloud concurred with Newton Cumming's assessment that "clustered housing" is not a good idea and that residents should, when possible, be allowed to build on their own lands.

Mr. Iron Cloud estimates that over the years Housing has developed 2,500 homes on the reservation and that a large number of those units have been conveyed to private owners who paid off their homes. Currently, there are eighteen new homes under construction. Housing has developed over fifty projects and currently manages a housing stock of their own of 1,200 rental units and 400 home ownership units.

Upon assuming the position of Chief Executive Officer, Paul Iron Cloud moved quickly to correct four HUD audit findings which if further neglected might have placed continued HUD funding in peril. The staff and Board have developed and implemented several major management policies in subsequent years that have gone a long way in restoring confidence in Housing and its programs.

The Oglala Sioux had the chance to be the first tribe in the country to build their own homes with federal support and then went out and did it, observed Paul Iron Cloud.



Over the years the program has helped many families and young people, especially those who needed better living conditions in which to study and enjoy their family life. Reservation life, however, has changed much over the years and Mr. Iron Cloud believes tribal officials need to keep up with those changes.

Wilbur Between Lodges, who has also served as President of the Tribe and as the Fifth Member of the Council, is now Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing's Public Relations Liaison with the Tribal government and the different communities on the reservation. He became involved through contact with Paul Iron Cloud when both of them were working decades ago on improving the Tribe's financial problems. Mr. Between Lodges believes there is still a large need for housing on the reservation and better communications with housing tenants and home owners but that the present board is making good strides in accomplishing this. Evidence of that, he contends, is the success being achieved by the Tenant Service Representatives program that continues the early practice of sending trained staff to work with tenants and owners in all reservation communities. He credits Paul Iron Cloud for making "many positive changes" in the reservation housing programs.

Current Direction

When asked to evaluate the housing needs that should be attained quickly, Paul Iron Cloud offered the comment that there is a strong need for "emergency housing," which occurs with some regularity on all reservations including Pine Ridge. He commented that the recertification of tenants is a continually expensive and time-consuming issue that should be remedied. His staff is also working on improving Housing's maintenance program to keep homes looking better and so they will be more enjoyable for the owner or tenant for a longer period of time.

Mr. Iron Cloud estimates the current need for new housing on the reservation is at approximately 4,000 new homes and that increased funding by HUD is badly needed to meet that need. He believes that, along with the education programs currently underway on the reservation, the provision of the HUD homes over the years probably has made the biggest positive change in the lives of the residents there. He readily points out that Johnson Holy Rock deserves most of the credit for getting the housing program started in the first place, and his goal is to continue that process. When asked what aspect of the program, in addition to obtaining the 4,000 new homes, he viewed as the most important goal to pursue, he said he believes that it is important to achieve a better maintenance program, address community violence through obtaining the funds necessary to do that, and work more closely with the residents to involve them in all of those efforts.

Glenn Barber pointed out in his interview for this history of Housing that work on housing is a major reservation job production effort and one of his goals is trying to create more "pride of ownership" on the part of owners and tenants. Barber especially underscored the need for stronger maintenance education programs and would like to see a program of "preventative maintenance" instituted that would result in fewer "emergency calls," which are a drain on Housing funds and staff, he believes. More financial assistance is needed but there also should be a program to develop and use materials that require less maintenance.



There is still a long waiting list of people desiring to move into Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing units in almost every reservation community. This has resulted in members of the Tribal government sometimes attempting to influence who should get the next available unit but Housing is now carefully adhering to admissions waiting lists and fair “first come, first served” procedures.

The Legacy of Johnson Holy Rock

By all accounts, Johnson Holy Rock is viewed to be the “grandfather of the Indian housing” nationally as well as at Pine Ridge. He initiated the program in 1961 and remained interested in Indian housing until he passed away in January 2012 at the age of 93. Mr. Holy Rock’s Indian name is “Little Chief.” He said “Johnson” was given to him by his father who was friendly with a “Boss Farmer” on the reservation with that name who helped Indians learn to farm. When asked about his age he explained that Indians are not big on birthday dates, but more into “seasonal birthdays.”

As an example, his father was born in the “season when the wild roses bloom.” He identified himself with the Lakota Badger Band that had two twin chiefs. In fact, he pointed out that his immediate family consists of “seven sets of girl twins plus him and a brother.”

Prior to the HUD and BIA housing programs, Mr. Holy Rock stated in an interview in 2010 that housing



was obtained by cutting down such trees as existed on the reservation and “flattening” them. Over all the years since the initiation of the first housing project, he purposely never accepted a house despite repeated offers for him to do so. His view of the various treaties with the “Long Knives” was that they do not say that the Indian “will be taken care of,” only “to be assisted,” and so that is what he demanded and expected from the government, which, in his estimation, has been “slow in coming.”

As an Army veteran of World War II and having met President John F. Kennedy in person at the White House in 1961, he believed of the Kennedy proclamation, that provided funds of Indian housing, that it “was the right time for the leader of the country to say the right thing.”

Mr. Holy Rock wanted to see the current tribal leadership become more active in planning for the younger members of the Tribe. There was “lots of room” for more development, in his estimation. He was not completely satisfied with the reservation housing situation in the 1960’s so he “did something about it.” He believed there should be more of that attitude today. He also believed that the Tribe is running out of space for housing and people will have to “look up” and accept higher buildings. In his view, there is a nagging lack of communication among the people and, between the tribal government and the people, and that attention should be paid to improving that communication. He also avowed that the U.S. government should have seen there would be a “cultural clash” and prepared better to work things out, but the Tribe was “on its own” and “had to learn” the hard way.



Conclusion

It is important for tribal members, tribes across the country and the people in South Dakota, to know that the Oglala Sioux Tribe and its housing entity, Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing, was greatly responsible for the first federally funded housing program in South Dakota and the first federally funded Indian housing authority. By 2012, this chartered tribal agency had provided thousands of badly needed houses on the Pine Ridge reservation and along the way influenced Indian housing across the Dakotas and throughout the United States. It also has impacted, for better and worse, all tribal members. As Johnson Holy Rock said, its influence and leadership in the future will be vitally important. For over 50 years, Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing has persistently advocated for more money from the federal government and private sectors for Indian housing while working hard to better deliver services to its tenants, homebuyers and program participants. Though a lot has been accomplished since 1961, the staff and Board of Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing remain committed today to bettering their program, their reservation and Indian housing.

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