



## **'THE BEARS ON PINE RIDGE' SHEDS LIGHT ON THE NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH SUICIDE CRISIS**

*FILMED OVER 5 YEARS, THIS FILM IS TOLD THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF A LIFESAVING FEMALE ELDER AND A RESILIENT YOUNG GROUP OF SUICIDE SURVIVORS*

Washington, DC, – A short documentary film titled 'The Bears on Pine Ridge' will be screening at the DC Independent Film Festival, from March 30th through April 8th, 2021. The documentary was shot over a five-year period from 2015 to 2020, giving audiences unprecedented access to the realities of a State-of-Emergency suicide crisis happening within the community of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. This documentary displays truthful and powerfully intimate perspectives from the POV of the community, while bringing to light a story of hope: an inspirational young group of suicide survivors who are speaking up about the issue and banding together to bring joyful high energy performances to other youth in their community.

The filmmakers hope this unique film which details a courageous group of suicide survivors will open a much-needed nationwide discussion about the Native youth suicide crisis, as well as to the declared State of Emergencies from Tribal Nations across the country (that have gone largely unnoticed).

DC Independent Film Festival will be showing the film virtually as well as holding a live screening with a live Q&A panel with several of the main subjects in the film.

**TRAILER:** <https://youtu.be/xLJytVyvaX4>



**#NativeHope #NativeResiliency #SuicidePrevention #NativeLivesMatter**

**What:** DC Independent Film Festival

**When:** March 30th - April 8th

**Where:** Streaming online with a live screening and Q&A (Tiny DeCory) on April 6th <https://dciff-indie.org>

**Who: The Bears on Pine Ridge (40 min. Documentary)**

- Sonny Skyhawk, *Executive Producer, Sicangu Lakota, Rosebud Sioux Nation,*
- Yvonne “Tiny” DeCory, *Founder of BEAR Program & Suicide Prevention for Olala Sioux Tribe*
- Eileen Janis, *Suicide Prevention for Olala Sioux Tribe*
- Noel Bass, *Director / Producer*

**Why:** Native youth (ages 12-24) are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than the National average. The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota has been perhaps the most publicized of the struggling Native communities, having declared three Suicide State of Emergencies (2009, 2015, 2020) in 11 years. Yet, the topic remains an extremely underrepresented and underserved issue. There is an overall failure of adequate federal assistance to help Native youth mental health. Tribes across the country like the Navajo in Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Montana’s Fort Belknap Reservation, the Blackfeet tribe, The Crow Reservation, Rosebud Reservation, The Omaha Tribe in Nebraska, have all declared Youth Suicide State of Emergencies since 2015, yet most Americans are completely unaware about the existence of Tribal communities in general.

A recent extensive survey from IllumiNative ( <https://rnt.firstnations.org/research/> ) found, *“The majority of Americans know little to nothing about Native Americans...Invisibility is one of the biggest barriers Native peoples face in advocating for tribal sovereignty, equity & social justice.”*

**Documentary Synopsis:** In 2015, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation declared a State of Emergency after a cluster of suicides devastates the community. To make matters worse, less than a year into the State of Emergency, the Oglala Sioux Tribe’s only outreach suicide prevention program (The Sweetgrass Project) loses all federal funding and is forced to dismantle.

Two respected Lakota grandmothers are left to becoming the only 24-hour suicide prevention team on the reservation. Yvonne “Tiny” DeCory and Eileen Janis, both former outreach workers with the Sweetgrass Project, now work independently as prevention specialists within the community. Tiny’s passion project, The Bear Program, is a group of suicide surviving Lakota teenagers who speak to the community about the realities of suicide in their community. In addition to awareness, these “Bear kids” lead a resilient charge to bring joy and hope to the youth, as they dress and perform high energy musical skits in big bright animal mascot outfits.

Tyra Standing Bear is a young BEAR hopeful, a 17-year-old teenager struggling with PTSD and suicide ideations, after losing her best friend to suicide. She volunteers as a BEAR Helper and hopes to one day put on a costume and perform with the BEARS. Through Tyra’s journey in the film, viewers will witness the story arc of a teenager who perseveres through the toughest of times.

**The Project Goal:** is to bring a much-needed national awareness and nationwide discussion to the Native youth mental health crisis that most Americans are completely unaware of. Through an intimate film that hopes to emotionally connect with a wider audience, the filmmakers believe viewers will be educated to the issue, motivated by a human connection to the subjects in the film. These incredible individuals who are helping to save lives are symbols of hope and perseverance. The youth they mentor are courageous young individuals who exemplify the resilience of the Native American spirit.

This short film has been submitted to various National and International film festivals in an attempt to bring a wider audience for a much-needed discussion about the issue. The filmmakers also hope to gain support to enable them to make a full-length feature film, which will explore this nationwide crisis in greater detail.

Below is a link to a private screener of this film, for your consideration:

**Link to Video:** <https://vimeo.com/474972260>

**Password:** SKYHAWK2021

## **STATISTICS & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

Pine Ridge has a population of roughly 30 to 40 thousand residents, there were 1,325 total suicide ideations recorded from 2015 to 2019. During that same time period, there were 860 total suicide attempts. - *from 2020 Suicide State of Emergency announcement by President Julian Running Bear*

Lack of: awareness, funding, stats and data from reliable National organizations present as obstacles. With no historical data, it is difficult for organizations helping Native Americans to obtain grants.

In 2018, the Reclaiming Native Truth (RNT) Project was released. It was a two-year, \$3.3 million public opinion research and strategy setting initiative by NGO IllumiNative. Its findings resulted in comprehensive data and learning about the **challenges and opportunities that Native Americans face in educating Americans and changing public perceptions**. RTN found that “Invisibility is the modern form of bias against Native Americans...The majority of Americans know little to nothing about Native Americans...Many Americans are not clear how many Native peoples still exist. The study also found that 78% of Americans want to learn more about the Native American culture.

## **QUOTES:**

*“We are struggling. We simply cannot bear to lose any more of our children. Whenever we lose one child, it hurts the spirit and soul of every one of our people.”* - John Yellow Bird Steele, President of the Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribe – 2015

*“For the nearly 5-year period of December 2014 to June 2019...the statistic totals were as follows...1,325 total ideation with Plan and Intent...860 total attempts.”* August 2020 Suicide State of Emergency Proclamation, Julian Bear Runner-OST President

*“In the Lakota language, Bear, ‘Matho’, means good medicine... the BEAR Program brings that good medicine. It’s the young people that are instilling hope. They’re telling these other kids their own story because they’ve lived it too.”* - Yvonne “Tiny” DeCory, BEAR Program Co-Founder, Suicide Prevention - Oglala Sioux Tribe

## **ORGANIZATIONS/SUPPORTERS:**

- BEARS Program, Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota
- [Alcohol Justice](#)
- American Indigenous in Film and Television
- Montana Blackfeet Tribal Suicide Prevention
- Project Tomorrow, Montana (United Way)

## **For More information visit:**

- Twitter @BearsOnPineRidg
- Instagram @pineridgedocumentary
- Facebook @pineridgedocumentary

**#NativeHope #NativeResiliency #SuicidePrevention #NativeLivesMatter**

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**SOURCE:** The Bears on Pine Ridge, a documentary film; Alcohol Justice.

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