



Language learners

Immersion school surrounds youngsters with Ojibwe language, culture

In April 2008 the United Nations reported that nearly 90 percent of the world's languages are likely to disappear before the end of the century, leaving approximately 700 languages actively spoken around the world. The disappearance of a language not only means a loss of words, but it also means that a culture is lost to the world. In Itasca County, one community is working to make sure its language – and through that, its culture – survives.

Located on the Leech Lake Reservation and hosted by the Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School, the Niigaane Ojibwe Language Immersion Program started six years ago after community members decided it was time to revitalize their native language. Most fluent speakers of Ojibwemowin, as the language is known, are elders. Many were reluctant to teach the language to their children due to historical and recent disruptions to the social fabric of the culture.

"Amongst our oldest generation, they would tell us kids, 'go in the other room,' and they would just speak it (Ojibwemowin) with their friends, peers and brothers or sisters," said Leslie Harper, program director and instructor in the immersion program. "We knew that our language would be lost to our community within a very short amount of time, because our kids were not speaking our language."

To repair this link between younger generations and their Ojibwe roots, the program started with one kindergarten class and planned to add a grade every year. The curriculum was set to cover all academic subjects, but they would all be taught in Ojibwe.

With a current enrollment of 26 students in grades K-5, this growing program remains vital; it continues to help community members bridge cultural gaps with visible success.

"Our kids are getting to the point where they will, if they see an elder in our community, go up to them and speak to them in Ojibwe – and that is something that hasn't happened in our community in decades," Harper said.

According to Harper, this sort of success in revitalizing a language stems from community support. The parents of the students enrolled in the program are expected to make a commitment to learn the language and volunteer at the school while the Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig community actively engages Niigaane students in Ojibwemowin when they are outside of their classroom.

"They've got a grandma in the classroom who is there every day, so they are learning how to interact with the elderly members of our community. They're seeing how adults interact," Harper explained.

Another way community members have supported the school is by lending their knowledge as local experts to make cultural additions to its curriculum, such as teaching the students about the tradition of harvesting wild rice.

This type of community support augments tribal support for the program and its efforts to breathe life into their language, but it also, according to Harper, "enables our kids to really have an identity, to really understand who they are."

Even with these victories, there are still challenges ahead.

Harper sees the school's biggest challenges as certification issues and annual development. The certification issues are related to instructor guidelines set by the federal "No Child Left Behind" act, which requires that teachers be certified for all academic content. This makes finding teachers difficult, due to the fact that they must also speak Ojibwe.



Classroom "grandma" and tribal elder Leona Wakonabo reads books in Ojibwemowin with Niigaane students.

Funding is the facility's greatest development challenge. Harper's short term goal is to create a K-6 school, but, "finding funding to assist people, and just funding to keep our development projects going" is a year-to-year process.

But even with the linguistic and fiscal challenges, the Niigaane School has already proven to be a catalyst for change on a small scale, and Harper hopes to see continued success.

"I think that we're a small part of a cultural shift, a healthy cultural shift. We owe that to our supporters and the parents who keep their kids enrolled in the program and continue to send them there year after year; it's about the kids and their families," she said.

While cultural revitalization is the major force behind the school, immersion education has also been proven to bring higher academic results when compared to monolingual programs. The Niigaane School is currently in a longitudinal study with four other indigenous immersion schools to study the effects of their coursework on their students' academic performance.

After receiving funding from the Leech Lake Tribal Council and the Grotto Foundation, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe was awarded a grant of more than \$120,000 by the Blandin Foundation to help develop curriculum to support the Niigaane Ojibwe Language Immersion Program.

Foundation president. "Our top priority has been to help be a source of stability despite difficult times. We have had to be especially careful in giving new grants, but we have been able to continue to honor long-term commitments, especially locally. And, because we had been anticipating a breakthrough in forest conservation work, the Foundation was able to act when the possibility surfaced for an easement on UPM-Blandin working forest lands."

At its peak in October 2007, the trust that funds the Blandin Foundation was valued at \$420 million. Following its dip to \$250 million in February 2009, the Trust had recovered nearly one-third of this loss by the end of October 2009.

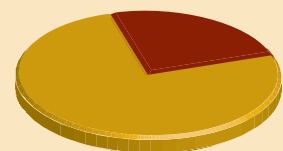
In the midst of this turbulent economy, the Foundation asked Moody's Investors Service to review its financial rating. Since its first review in 2004, the Foundation has had the highest rating (A3) and Moody's affirmed this rating again in 2009. In their review, evaluators wrote that "The stable outlook reflects Moody's expectation that the Foundation will maintain flexibility in its expense base, favorable balance sheet cushion, positive operating performance and debt service coverage."

"We are working hard to keep our eyes both on today's needs and our promise that the Foundation will be available to communities forever," said Jim Hoolihan. "We'll have to see where the economy leads in 2010,

but we stand ready to continue to partner in any way we can, especially during such difficult times."

In 2009, the Foundation will distribute an estimated \$10.9 million in grants (plus \$7 million for the Upper Mississippi Forest easement) and invest \$2.5 million in its community leadership training and public policy work.

Grants Awarded 2003-2008



Grand Rapids/Itasca Area	\$70,318,373 (76%)
Rural Minnesota	\$22,395,661 (24%)

Note: Full financial statements always can be found at the Blandin Foundation web site or by contacting the Foundation.

A share in progress

2008 grants infuse community action

For more than a half-century, the Blandin Foundation has been a partner in community-driven activities in the Grand Rapids area and rural Minnesota. Working with people who share the Foundation's mission of strengthening communities, grantmaking efforts move forward projects and programs of all sizes and scopes, giving people here, and throughout the state, the opportunity to enhance their communities.

Grants listed below were awarded between January and December 2008, and were made in the Foundation's six strategic focus areas. Each focus area addresses a unique aspect of rural life, with the common vision of healthy rural communities grounded in strong economies, where burdens and benefits are widely shared. Dark type denotes grants made in the Foundation's home giving area (greater Itasca County). This list does not include grants of \$1,000 or less.

Economic Initiatives

Local Grants

Arrowhead Regional
Dev Commission \$25,000
 Partial funding for comprehensive planning activities for five Itasca County communities

City of Bigfork \$9,400
 Partial funding to update the Bigfork airport layout plan

City of Bovey \$5,000
 Support for the Greenway Sports Complex

Depot Commons Association \$100,000
 For continued support of the Workforce Development Initiative

Grand Rapids Area
Community Foundation \$50,000
 Project support for forest education-related events in Itasca County

Grand Rapids Area
Community Foundation \$10,000
 Matching support for the Itasca County Area Forest Legacy Fund

City of Grand Rapids \$35,175
 Project support to update the Riverfront Framework Plan

Grand Rapids Economic
Dev Authority \$175,000
 For the development of a Commercial Building Improvement Loan program

Itasca Community College \$10,000
 Support for the annual Council of Eastern Forest Technician Schools (CEFTS) international conference

Itasca Economic Development
Corporation \$250,000
 For continued operating assistance to promote economic development in Itasca County

Itasca Orchestral Society \$1,400
 Joint marketing exploration for arts organizations in Itasca County

Reif Arts Council \$310,000
 Continued support to provide arts programming to residents in Itasca County and rural Minnesota

City of Remer \$5,000
 To develop a comprehensive plan for the Remer area

The Conservation Fund \$150,000
 Project support for the Outdoor Heritage Fund to purchase a conservation easement on private forests in the Itasca area for non-forest use

U of MN Extension \$4,000
 Operations support for the Woodland Owners and Users Conference

Rural MN
BioBusiness Alliance of Minnesota \$250,000
 To develop capability and infrastructure to commercialize bioscience-based technology, create jobs and improve the status of the economy in rural Minnesota

City of Biwabik \$5,000
 Development of a long-term strategic plan due to the resurgence of the iron ore industry

Brown County Economic
Dev Partners \$5,000
 Develop a plan for strengthening economic opportunities

Central Iron Range Initiative \$7,500
 Facilitation and costs of a retreat to revitalize membership and strategy

City of Albert Lea \$3,000
 Feasibility study of arts development opportunities

Community Reinvestment Fund \$250,000
 For a program-related investment to support business development in rural Minnesota

CREED \$5,000
 Support for the "Discover Science on the Range in the Field of Energy" workshop

DoveTail Partners, Inc. \$20,000
 Project support for the Minnesota Northwoods Carbon Credit Partnership in northern Minnesota

DoveTail Partners, Inc. \$25,000
 Project support for the Eco-Affordable Housing Program and Minnesota-Made Home Project in rural Minnesota

Great Woods North \$10,000
 Seed money to promote the use of conservation subdivisions

Headwaters Regional
Dev Commission \$10,000
 Coordination support of community working groups for Bemidji Leads

City of Hutchinson \$1,500
 To conduct research on best practices in business incubation as part of the Community Advantage Leadership Program

Lakewood Health System \$26,000
 To implement the LightSpeed program

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe \$10,000
 For the Northern Minnesota Reservation Economic Development Summit

MN Chippewa Tribe \$90,000
 For a business development center focusing on Native American entrepreneurs in rural Minnesota

Minnesota Wood
Education Project \$90,000
 For the FSC Group Certification program in rural Minnesota

UMD-Natural Resources
Research Institute \$15,000
 Partial support for costs to undergo initial FEMA review of containerized emergency housing concept

City of New Ulm \$4,000
 For a community planning retreat

Northland Foundation \$2,500
 For a pilot training session on business ownership succession

Northwest Minnesota Foundation \$300,000
 For technical assistance and to launch innovations to grow the economy in rural Minnesota

Occupational Development
Center, Inc. \$50,000
 Capital support to relocate production operations in rural Minnesota

Region 9 Development Commission \$5,000
 To work with the Minnesota Design Team to develop an economic development strategy for the City of Gaylord

Renewing the Countryside II \$50,000
 Planning and implementation support for the Journeys with First Nations sustainable tourism marketing initiative in rural Minnesota

Rural Renewable Energy Alliance \$50,000
 For renewable energy manufacturing on the Leech Lake Indian Reservation

Southern Minnesota
Initiative Foundation \$45,000
 Project support for the Regional Competitiveness Project

Southern Minnesota
Initiative Foundation \$75,000
 Project support to increase the success of new immigrant/minority individuals

Southwest Initiative Foundation \$50,000
 Start-up support for creation of the Entrepreneurship Initiative

Wells Academy \$50,000
 Expand apprentice machinist job training program for unemployed Native Americans on the Red Lake, White Earth and Leech Lake reservations

City of Windom \$42,000
 To implement the LightSpeed program

Educational Attainment

Local Grants

Independent School District 2 \$75,000
 Project support to implement early childhood programming in the Hill City School District

Independent School District 316 \$10,000
 Community dialogues and strategic planning activities for the Greenway and Deer River school districts

Independent School District 317 \$10,000
 Support for the Deer River FIRST Robotics Team

Itasca Community College \$4,900
 Support for the Blandin Community Partners in Leadership work group to conduct research on increasing job skills through higher education for low-wage, low-income workers

Itasca Community College \$2,900
 Financial aid presentations to Itasca County high schools

Itasca Community College \$100,000
 Project support for the Native Student Achievement Initiative

Itasca Community College \$350,000
 For financial aid assistance for Itasca County high school graduates during the 2009-10 school year

KOOTASCA Community Action \$5,500
 Project support for the Minnesota Reading Corps program

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe \$121,994
 To pilot a language revitalization program designed specifically to teach the Ojibwe language in Itasca County and neighboring counties

Northern Lights Community School \$3,000
 Support for a seminar on adolescent motivation and underachievement for area educators and parents

Reif Arts Council \$6,735
 Support for the Partners in Education teacher training workshops

City of Marble \$2,000
 Capital support for the Marble Library

Rural MN
Cook County Higher Education \$125,000
 Operating and program support for the Distance Education Resource Center in Grand Marais

Greater Twin Cities United Way \$20,000
 Develop a business plan that will direct the state in early childhood education and care policies

Independent School District 36 \$3,000
 Implementation of the Blandin Hope Study recommendations

MN Campus Compact \$20,000
 For two regional planning sessions to improve the college success rate of low-income students and students of color in rural Minnesota

MN State Colleges and
Universities Fdn. \$225,000
 Project support to pilot the Northern Minnesota College Readiness Partnership to improve student success and build capacity among local school districts and community colleges in northern Minnesota

Naytahwaush Community
Foundation \$100,000
 Start-up support for early childhood literacy, culture-based childcare and parent support services at the Naytahwaush Early Learning Center on the White Earth Reservation

Northeast Service Cooperative \$6,500
 Planning effort to determine the interest and readiness of east Iron Range school districts to undertake a collaborative effort similar to the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative

Northland Community and
Tech College \$40,000
 Project support to provide a Retention Specialist for nursing program students from the White Earth Reservation

Northland Foundation \$5,000
 Support of the Northeastern Minnesota Early Childhood Summit

College of St. Scholastica \$10,000
 Project support to develop best practices in teaching ethical leadership and social responsibility and infuse lessons learned into business and technology curriculum in rural Minnesota

Independent School District 2170 \$50,000
 Planning and implementation to identify theme-based educational opportunities for Staples-Wotley School District to expand opportunities for students

University of Minnesota \$5,000
 Partial support for the "First in Family" policy dialogue to increase the number of first-generation students who graduate from four-year universities

Fairness and Opportunity

Local Grants

Advocates for Family Peace \$500,000
 Capital support to renovate its existing building

Advocates for Family Peace \$5,810
 Support for the "End the Silence, End the Violence" seminar

Arrowhead Economic
Opportunity Agency \$10,000
 For the Rural Rides program in Itasca County

City of Bovey \$2,500
 Upgrades to the West Range Senior Citizens Center

Bovey/Coleraine Youth Center \$85,000
 For continued operating support of the Youth Center

Bovey/Coleraine Youth Center \$3,810
 New Year's Eve community party as part of Children First 2008 New Year's Eve Celebration

Boys & Girls Club of
Leech Lake Area \$75,000
 For continued operating support of the Boys and Girls Club in Deer River

Centennial Rotary Club
of Grand Rapids \$1,700
 Support for the 2008 community Thanksgiving dinner

Edge of the Wilderness
Community Ctr \$2,500
 Sponsorship of the 2008 summer Stages Theater production

ElderCircle \$7,500
 For marketing efforts for volunteer recruitment

GRACE House of Itasca County \$400,000
 Capital and operating support to continue and expand services to those who are homeless

Grand Rapids Area
Community Foundation \$4,800
 Support for publishing and printing the 2008 Itasca Area Nonprofit Guide

Grand Rapids Area
Community Foundation \$40,000
 Supplemental support for the Itasca County Sharing Fund

City of Grand Rapids \$2,500
 Develop a strategic plan for the Grand Rapids Area Library

City of Grand Rapids \$3,900
 Community fireworks display as part of Children First 2008 New Year's Eve Celebration

Hope House Of Itasca County \$250,000
 Capital support to construct a chemical dependency residential treatment men's facility

Hope House Of Itasca County \$50,000
 Planning and design for a new rural facility for residential chemical dependency treatment

Itasca County Family YMCA \$5,000
 Kitchen equipment to offer community meals for residents in the Itasca County area

Itasca Cty Health & Human Services \$2,500
 Support for a survey to assess the visitor experience at the Itasca Resource Center

Itasca Cty Health & Human Services \$25,000
 Bridge funding for the Kathleen Blatz Family Recovery Program

KOOTASCA Community Action \$250,000
 For the Low Income Heating Assistance Program

KOOTASCA Community Action \$95,000
 For continued support for the Crisis Nursery Program

KOOTASCA Community Action \$290,700
 For continued support of Circles of Support

KOOTASCA Community Action \$82,200
 For general operating support that allows the KOOTASCA staff to undertake leadership positions in community-based initiatives dealing with poverty in Itasca County

KOOTASCA Community Action \$55,000
 For continued support of the Teenage Parent Program

KOOTASCA Community Action \$3,500
 For a planning initiative that will provide a policy paper to the Legislative Commission to End Poverty on the Circles of Support methodology

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe \$1,500
 Children First 2008 New Year's Eve Celebration for the Inger community

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe \$1,500
 Children First 2008 New Year's Eve Celebration in S. Lake

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe \$1,750
 Children First 2008 New Year's Eve Celebration for the Ball Club/Winnie Dam area

Legal Aid Service of
Northeastern MN \$73,350
 Project support for the Foreclosure Prevention Program

Legal Aid Service of
Northeastern MN \$330,750
 For continued operating support to provide legal services to residents of Itasca County

MN Council of Nonprofits Inc. \$9,785
 To offer educational opportunities to build the capacity of area nonprofits

MN Council on Foundations \$6,318
 For Minnesota Grantmakers online subscriptions

MS Headwaters Area
Dental Health Center \$10,000
 Partial support for a dental clinic serving the underprivileged and underinsured in western Itasca County

Northland Counseling
Center/Itasca County \$49,000
 Capital improvements for the facility, grounds and Kiesler House

Second Harvest North
Central Food Bank \$40,000
 Project support for food delivery subsidies in the Itasca County area

Youth for Christ \$131,000
 Continuation funding for the Ground Floor Youth Center in Itasca County

Rural MN

Community Resource
Connections, Inc. \$45,000
 Project support for efforts to reduce high suicide rates in northern Beltrami, southern Koochiching and western Itasca counties

Corporation for Supportive
Housing \$100,000
 Project support for the MN American Indian tribes supportive housing initiative in rural Minnesota

Greater MN Housing Fund \$2,000,000
 For continued support to create affordable housing for families in rural Minnesota

Jacobson Community
Center Foundation \$7,500
 For upgrades to the community center building

Minnesota Coalition for
Battered Women \$10,000
 For the Women of Color and Native Women's Leadership Project

Northland Foundation \$25,000
 Project support for the Northland Village Assisted Living Initiative in rural Minnesota

Red Lake Nation Boys & Girls Club \$10,000
 Support for general operations in rural Minnesota