



On to South Dakota: *A report by Jody Skelton*



My husband John and I were fortunate to participate in the first “wave” of YMCA Alumni members to participate in our National Service Project in Dupree, So. Dakota. It was my first time in the State and we arrived in Grand Rapids, Mich., two days prior to the beginning of the work week.

This gave us a great opportunity to explore the Black Hills, the Badlands, Custer State Park and Jewel Cave. There is a lot to do in the Grand Rapids area so having a bit of extra time on either end of a work trip (which we recommend) will give you some flexibility to enjoy the area.

Stayed at the building site



We chose to stay at the YMCA Volunteer Center in Dupree adjacent to the tiny home village building site, which was a great decision for us. We had our own bedroom, bathroom and a shared Living/kitchen area.

We liked being on site and not having to go back and forth to the motel in the town of Faith. The bunkroom, which we cleaned and set up for the next group, was “campy,” but adequate with bathrooms and showers. The YMCA of Seven Council Fires (new name for the Sioux YMCA) has a huge presence in Dupree and the Tiny Homes project has had the local indigenous people integrally involved from the start. Once built, the four tiny homes will be used for local women in transition who need safe housing in the midst of a supportive community.

George Painter is “the man with the plan” and he coordinated our daily work schedule. It was great to meet and work with other YMCA Alumni members from around the country and our days flew by as each time. George was on hand assigning us the next project just as we completed the one we were working on.



It is very satisfying to work hard and give back to the families in Dupree. This tiny community is a two and one half hour drive through the prairie and is quite remote. The town has a store, a school, a town office building, a small bar, two churches and 50 HUD homes.

A huge housing deficit

There is a huge housing deficit on the reservation and many homes house multiple family generations. Each day, Frank, the YMCA's chef, prepares 47 lunches and an average of 15 children eat their dinner meal each night at the Y. They also have an active after-school program, are starting a day care, and run YMCA Camp Leslie Marrowbone, the summer resident camp.

We felt our time was well spent and we highly recommend other YMCA Alumni participate. The YMCA Staff works hand in hand with the Dupree community and this project will make positive change for years to come. Don't hesitate to contact us if you have any specific questions and we hope to see you in South Dakota We plan on returning again next year. .



Photos: Jody Skelton; John Skelton at "smudging ceremony;" the site in early morning; building work tables. (Photos by Jody)

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