We began as a small group of people answering a call to action, and in 10 years, have evolved into a comprehensive nonprofit. We collaborate with—and empower—Lakota youth and families to improve the health, culture and environment of our community in a way that heals and strengthens our identity. And in a way that transforms this place we proudly call home.

Through our work, we are actively disrupting the status quo and creating models of change that overpower intergenerational poverty and build momentum toward regional equity.

Inspired by our ancestors, and propelled by our youth, we are Thunder Valley CDC.

**THIS IS OUR STORY.**

The traditional life of our Lakota ancestors was one of determination and ingenuity. Our enduring relationships with the Creator, and the environment, led us to develop a thriving society, durable economy, and comprehensive set of beliefs built on sustainability, spirituality and community.

Today, we return to those roots with a bold hope for our future: to change our reservation forever.

Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation is a Lakota-led grassroots organization working to create systemic change on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.
How long are you going to let other people decide the future for your children?

Are you not warriors? It's time to stop talking. And start doing.
There was an awful lot of complaining on the reservation. Teenagers and elders alike, troubled by their circumstances were losing hope and wanted something different.

While the path forward may have been unclear, there was one thing for certain: No one was going to care as much about our people as we do. And yet, we were ready for change.

But not impossible.

Moving beyond the ideas, and into action, was going to be hard. Moving beyond the ideas, and into action, was going to be hard. Members who had ideas and who believed things could be different. Members who had ideas and who believed things could be different.

Quietly, there were conversations among a small group of young people about how to create a movement. There certainly wasn’t a shortage of people who cared about this community—community members who had ideas and who believed things could be different. But not impossible.

And yet, we were ready for change.

Don’t come from a place of fear. Come from a place of hope. Anything is possible, but you need to take action.

That change needed to come from within.

If we wanted transformation, we needed to create it. If we wanted transformation, we needed to create it. The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, like many of our nation’s reservations—has been battered and erased. These feelings weren’t unwarranted either—the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation has been battered and erased. These feelings weren’t unwarranted either—the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation has been battered and erased.

There was an awful lot of complaining on the reservation. Teenagers were looking for hope and an answer, too. This was their home, and they were losing hope and feeling alienated by their circumstances. These feelings weren’t unwarranted either—
The movement is here.

THE TIME IS NOW.

The movement is here.
From the very beginning, young people have been at the heart of our work. In fact, we were founded by young people who had young growing families.

During our early days, we started the practice of bringing youth to sacred sites around the Black Hills—it was an opportunity to expand our knowledge about Lakota culture, history, and spirituality. By sharing the practices of their ancestors, youth were empowered to think about how their actions would impact the future of their children.

Then, as a newly formed organization, eager to grow, we went public at the first public event of our community, the Lakota Nation Invitational in 2008. One of the largest Native events in South Dakota, our kids were wearing t-shirts, handing out flyers, and connecting with other community members to discuss the future of our community.

During the first year we also built our Community House, creating a place to gather in prayer, community and gratitude. Men, women, elders, and youth of our community came together to create this shared space, with our own hands. The house is still an important structure in our community today.

And building our community. We were going public.

Growing families. Our work. In fact, we were founded by young people who had young growing families at the heart of our organization.
In Thunder Valley CDC's early days, conversations and connections started to move the community forward in a thoughtful, meaningful, and progressive way. In the months to come, we gathered community members together for numerous meetings, resulting in hundreds of hours of discussions about our dreams. What we didn’t have was the resources to make these ideas into reality. Even though we didn’t have all the answers, we knew we had to know and pursue ideas that our youth had endless enthusiasm for. And they had a point—too often our people endured the disappointment of a hollow promise. But our youth had endless ideas and enthusiasm. If we wanted to create change, we first had to know what it was that we wanted to change. We needed to dream big, to think about the possibilities and not only the challenges, to dream big and think about the possibilities and not only the challenges.

"It doesn’t cost anything to dream big."!

Quickly, Thunder Valley CDC became a safe space for families to come together and have hard, honest discussions about who we are, what we want, and what we need to do to make it happen. Why tempt ourselves with these ideas when we don’t have the resources to make them into reality? Why create more broken promises for our people?

Some feel these discussions might be creating false hope. Why tempt ourselves with these ideas when we don’t have the resources to make them into reality? Why tempt ourselves with these ideas when we don’t have the resources to make them into reality? Why tempt ourselves with these ideas when we don’t have the resources to make them into reality?

These conversations carried an unexpected, but not unjustified, challenge: To think about the possibilities and not only the challenges. To think about the possibilities and not only the challenges.

In Thunder Valley CDC’s early days, conversations and connections started to move the community forward in a thoughtful, meaningful way.
In 2010, Thunder Valley CDC purchased 34 acres of land near Sharp’s Corner in Porcupine, South Dakota. An area noted for its rolling hills, vast plains, and vibrant sunsets, the land sits at the geographic center of the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Conversations with community members began to form tangible objectives through the Oyate Omniciye Consortium; or, the Circle Meetings of the People. With support from a number of foundations and federal partners, a regional planning document for the Pine Ridge Reservation began to take shape—informing decisions we would make about economic development, youth programming, education, infrastructure, and other things.

The work mobilized local partners. It also offered clear directions and priorities for our people. Through the development of the plan, our people could see more clearly our common goals and what we collectively envisioned for our reservation.

We were on-board and ready to work.

And so were they.

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We were on-board and ready to work.

And so were they.
We understood very early that solid, honest partnerships would maximize our chance of success. From our start, Thunder Valley CDC has been figuring out how to unlock doors previously closed on our people, cultivating relationships with partners that share our values as an organization, and recognizing that trust and mutual respect is the foundation of all quality partnerships. There’s much we have learned in our organization, and recognizing that trust and mutual respect is the basis of all relationships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivating meaningful partnerships with partners that share our values as people, cultivate
I've seen so many negative articles meant to show the truth of Pine Ridge, but they only capture half of it. "I've seen so many negative articles that someday the negative press won't have any truth to them at all."

Thunder Valley showed me there are people dedicated to making our home better by helping youth and preserving the earth.

They give me hope.
When we completed our first master plan, we thought the next step was to start building. But we realized that the plan didn’t feel like our community. So we were brave, and risky, and scrapped it. The redesign—what guides us today—is more green, more efficient, and places our Lakota culture at the center.

The world starts to know Thunder Valley CDC. President Barack Obama shines a light on our work, and legislators like Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD) and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro visit. The attention is a reminder of the reach of our work, and grounds our desire to root our work here at home.

An evening glow run and daytime color run remind us what happens when you set out to transform the community—laughter, joy, friendship, and more.

Support from foundations and federal partners allowed us to bring our planning to the next level, engaging kids and elders in our work and legislature like Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD) and Secretary Julian Castro. President Barack Obama shines a light on our work, and we were reminded that the plan didn’t feel real until we completed our first master plan. When we realized that the plan didn’t feel like our community, we realized that we had to change it. It launched our systemic work. You can see it throughout our history, and in the decisions we make every step of the way. Every action, every step, informs the next. Every idea, contemplate it, try it out, adjust it, and then drive it forward. It is grown and adapted and rooted by a group of people who take nothing is created in isolation.
They have decided as a community to take ownership of their future. THAT MAKES ME HOPEFUL.

– Barack Obama, 44th President of the United States
Looking out at the land, our early founders could see what it would become—a “show-me place,” as Lenny Lone Hill, a construction trainer in our community, referred to it. “People will soon see what we are doing.” With the purchase of the 34 acres of land, and the Oyate Omniciye Regional Plan in place, Thunder Valley CDC began moving forward, focusing programmatic efforts first on our youth through a Community Garden. We also got behind the ideas of other people and groups doing critical work for our people, like the Lakota Immersion Childcare Program that later grew into our Lakota Language Initiative.

Step into our Community Garden today, and you’ll find organic produce taking root. Planted and harvested by our Food Sovereignty Initiative and Youth Leadership Development Program participants, each year the plants—just like the program—take on a life of their own. Children and youth are building leadership and food sovereignty, and a revitalization of the Lakota language. In a few short years, the Lakota Language Initiative has grown into a cornerstone of our movement.

But our movement is growing to meet the needs of our community, and the ambitions of our youth. They have been nurtured carefully, and have grown into programs that have been imitating元件 at the heart of our community—food sovereignty, and a revitalization of the Lakota language. Both programs are tackling two critical issues in the community—food sovereignty, and a revitalization of the Lakota language. In a few short years, the Lakota Language Initiative has grown into a cornerstone of our movement.

Both programs, like our Community Garden, are helping our people and groups in our community. We also get behind the ideas of other people and groups doing critical work for our people, like the Lakota Immersion Childcare Program. We do not stop doing critical work for our people, like the Lakota Immersion Childcare Program. We also get behind the ideas of other people and groups doing critical work for our people, like the Lakota Immersion Childcare Program.

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This movement is one of empowerment, innovation, and learning. All of our work is place-based and comprehensive, centered on applying indigenous innovation in a way that honors our cultural heritage and is adapted for the needs and vision of our local community. You can see it in our people, our programs, and our structures. The movement is one of empowerment, innovation, and learning. All of our work is place-based and comprehensive, centered on applying indigenous innovation in a way that honors our cultural heritage and is adapted for the needs and vision of our local community. You can see it in our people, our programs, and our structures.

In 2013, that ingenuity could be found in the piles of straw bales delivered to Thunder Valley CDC, used to build the first-of-its-kind straw bale house in our community. The home that stands today, built from the ground up by engineers and community members, represents a different design for the remaining homes on the development. Ultimately, we chose a more efficient design. The house was an educational opportunity for our organization. It was a chance for us to refine our approach, and evaluate how we balance the costs associated with building a home like this alongside the need to create teachable moments that treat our communities as a 21st century workforce. Ultimately, we choose a different design for the remaining homes on the development.

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But it actually represents so much more. The house was an educational opportunity for our organization. It was a chance for us to refine our approach, and evaluate how we balance the costs associated with building a home like this alongside the need to create teachable moments that treat our communities as a 21st century workforce. Ultimately, we choose a different design for the remaining homes on the development.

What’s the legacy you want to leave?
In June 2015, on a perfectly cloudless day on Pine Ridge, hundreds of children and families and elders gathered at Thunder Valley CDC, and the first shovels broke the ground, marking the official start of our Regenerative Community Development and the first show of community, federal, and shared commitment.

But it wasn’t only Thunder Valley CDC staff or architects or visiting dignitaries breaking ground. It was every single one of us. Every community member, local partner, federal partner, and more took part in turning over soil as a symbol of what we would cultivate together.

From “Breaking Ground,” a poem by Mark Tilsen to commemorate our groundbreaking:

“THIS IS THE DAY we mend the hoop that was broken.
We build the world that was promised.
We mend the hoop that was broken.

And it will not be with letters of fire that we map the future, but with roots, houses, and planted trees.

“This is the day we mend the hoop that was broken.”

Listen to the full poem at www.thundervalley.org.
Housing is a major crisis on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Nearly 4,000 homes must be built in our community just to address the current housing shortage.

We knew we needed to be active in creating solutions that would provide our people with access to safe, affordable and sustainable homes where they could raise their families.

After our groundbreaking, construction began on the roads, water and sewer lines that are needed for our community. The actual homes also started to take shape, some constructed by women and men who are part of our Workforce Development Through Sustainable Construction Program. Launched in 2015, the program educates participants on how to build single-family homes from start to finish.

But the 10-month program isn’t just about learning the construction trade. Each person completes an individual education plan and success plan to improve the financial capacity of themselves and their families, and in turn, build a stronger tribal community.

This program creates a national model to alleviate poverty and build sustainable communities while training the local workforce in green building practices. At Thunder Valley CDC, we are invested in a set of principles that shape the holistic goals of our citizens, developing a healthy energy-efficient model that empowers families to take responsibility for their future.
WE are working to create SOLUTIONS that are as large and comprehensive as the historic challenges facing our community.

During our first decade, we strengthened our power to accomplish lasting change through dedicated grassroots practices, increasing our community’s ability to flourish, and setting an example for Native and rural communities everywhere.

As we continue the movement, we will incubate and nurture programs centered around seven focus areas.

1. Workforce. Our people need more access to jobs. We are creating them, building capacity by increasing our community’s ability to build community with our Lakota language. Through our Lakota Language Initiative, we nurture our children by building a community around Lakota language and learning about Lakota culture, our heritage.

2. Language. Less than 3% of our people speak Lakota fluently. Through our Lakota Language Initiative, we nurture our children by building a community around Lakota language and learning about Lakota culture, our heritage.

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In the years ahead, our people are driving the ways in which we do this work.

1. New buildings will begin to take shape at an accelerated pace, giving our community a blend of home, retail, recreation, and community spaces to live, work, and play in.

2. Our Food Sovereignty Coalition will lead initiatives that create affordable solutions to local food access, strengthen our local food network, and develop healthier communities.

3. The Social Enterprise Program will nurture new businesses and Thunder Valley CDC programs by offering trainings and spaces that give entrepreneurs every opportunity to be successful.

4. Through our Lakota language efforts, we will create a pipeline of Lakota learners and create unprecedented access to our language in a variety of forms—online, in-classroom, and immersion experiences.

5. In all we do, we renew our commitment to regional equity so that we transform the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Much has happened in the decade since our call to action. We are seeing with our own eyes, and are experiencing with our own hands, what it means to start something. There is also much to work toward as we enter our next decade of transformation. With the support of our people and extended community, Thunder Valley CDC has ambitious hopes for the future.
THIS IS ABOUT ALL OF US—

“All of Us—This Is About Us—

“...with THEM in mind.

We are laying the groundwork for a future that is deliberately created for our children and our grandchildren.

Andrew Iron Shell
This work is about disrupting the status quo and developing new systems for our people, based on the needs of our people. As we step into the next decade of Thunder Valley CDC, we will continue to move through our work in progressive and thought-challenging ways, while always taking a moment to pause, evaluate, learn, reflect, and then continue.

Through our movement building, we are producing repeatable, measurable models based on our values that can be utilized by other communities to inspire vital, transformative change. Our hope? To share what we learn—the successes and the failures—with people like you. People who are interested in knowing our story, And willing to share it back with others.

This is how change happens. On Pine Ridge. And everywhere.