

LITTLE SHELL VOICES

Official Little Shell Tribal Newsletter - February 2026

Aanii (Hello),

We started the year 2026 with a great and busy start. Despite the snow, ice and cold, the Tribal Council has been busy working on current projects and expanding services.

The Tribal Council wishes to highlight the tremendous work by the Little Shell Food Program – the Mijim Center. Mijim is the Anishinaabe word for food and this important program has been expanding its food to incorporate indigenous food staples. Mijim Center staff have been solidifying partnerships to ensure the Tribe is able to provide bison meat as key part of our “Meat and Greet” events. During Meat and Greet events, all Little Shell tribal members, with a valid identification, will be provided a food box. Our next event is March 14th, 2026 so be sure to stop by the Mijim Center! The Mijim Center is also a USDA certified Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) operation. The Tribe has seen significant growth in the FDPIR program over the past several months. This is a very important program for those experiencing hardships and the Tribe wants to ensure these low-income families have access to food. Households that are eligible for SNAP or meet income standards may apply to the Tribe’s FDPIR operation to receive monthly food packages. The Mijim Center offers a variety of healthy and nutritious foods including meats, frozen and fresh vegetables, grains, dairy products, and many other essential food products.

If you have or need assistance filling out an application, please call the Mijim Center at 406-315-2400 Ext. 130 or visit our staff at the Mijim Cetner at 1301 Stuckey Road, Great Falls, MT 59404. The growth and success of this program is a testament to the hard work of our tribal government employees.

As we continue into this new year, the Tribal Council will provide more updates on the growth of the Tribe’s programming and services.

Miigwech (Thank you),
Chairman Gerald Gray

INSIDE

• February Events

• Wellness Corner

• Cultural Corner

• Community Corner



FEBRUARY

EVENTS

LITTLE SHELL CULTURE CLUB



February 11th & 25th | 6pm-8pm
Elders Center

Connect, Learn, Belong
The Little Shell Culture Club welcomes youth, families, and community members of all ages to come together and reconnect with the traditions that shape our identity. Each gathering offers meaningful ways to explore traditional dance, drumming, songs, language, and other cultural teachings that reflect the heart of what it means to be Little Shell.

Whether you're just beginning your cultural journey or continuing a path of deeper learning, Culture Club is a space for shared knowledge, cross-generational connection, and genuine community. You'll find encouragement, friendship, and a sense of belonging — all through movement, music, and moments that keep our culture strong.

Everyone is welcome.

For dates, times, and locations, please contact the Little Shell Culture Department or follow the Tribe's Facebook page for the latest updates.

TOBACCO AND CULTURE CLUB



February 3rd & 17th | 6pm-8pm

At East Middle School, the Tobacco and Culture Club offers students a space to connect more deeply with their culture while building awareness around health and wellness.

Through engaging activities and conversations, students explore the important distinction between traditional tobacco and commercial tobacco, learning about the sacred role traditional tobacco plays in Native culture, and the harms associated with commercial use.

The club goes beyond prevention, it fosters respect, identity, and cultural pride, helping youth grow in both knowledge and confidence.

With guidance from trusted mentors, students gain tools that support not only healthier choices, but also a stronger sense of who they are and where they come from.

It's a meaningful, supportive space for youth to grow, culturally, personally, and together.

BINGO



February 5th & 19th | 6 to 8pm

Looking for a fun, relaxed way to connect with others? Community Bingo Nights are the perfect chance to gather with friends, family, and neighbors in a joyful and welcoming atmosphere.

These evenings are more than just bingo, they're about sharing laughter, conversation, and community spirit. Come enjoy light refreshments, win fun prizes, and make meaningful connections that help strengthen our Little Shell community. All ages are welcome, and there's always plenty of good energy to go around.

Whether you're a bingo pro or trying it for the first time, we'd love to see you there. Let's come together, support one another, and make some great memories!

All are welcome!

NALOXONE TRAINING & DISTRIBUTION

Free Community Service

Little Shell Tribal Health is proud to continue its commitment to the health and safety of our people by offering free Naloxone (Narcan) kits and community training.

Narcan is a fast-acting medication that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. Having it nearby — and knowing how to use it — can save a life in a critical moment.

We offer:

- ✓ Free kits available to all community members.
- ✓ Quick, accessible training on how to recognize and respond to an overdose.
- ✓ Supportive, no-pressure learning environment.

Opioid-related emergencies have impacted families throughout Indian Country. By increasing awareness and making response tools available, we empower one another to act — and protect our community.

Interested in a kit or training session for yourself, your family, or your department?

Contact Kasey Schindele at k.schindele@lstclinic.org
Or stop by the Little Shell Clinic

Being prepared makes a difference.
Together, we can help save lives.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION



FEBRUARY IS NATIONAL AMERICAN HEART MONTH!

Your heart works hard for you, take care of it with heart-healthy food choices! The Little Shell Food Distribution Program offers nutritious options like lean proteins, whole grains, low-sodium canned vegetables, and more to help you create meals that support your health.

This month, make a commitment to your heart health by eating balanced meals, staying active, and checking out the healthy options available through our program.

Your health is worth it, come see us at Little Shell Food Distribution and let us help you get started on your heart-healthy journey!

Take care of your heart. It's the only one you've got!

For more information, contact us or visit 1301 Stuckey Rd or call 406-315-2400 Ext130

ICWA



Happy New Year from the ICWA Department!! We are wishing all a great things this year.

As always, the ICWA Department is looking to assist Little Shell Citizens in becoming licensed foster parents so our children can stay within their culture. There is such a need for foster parents that can help the native children stay within their culture! Currently there are no Little Shell foster families for Little Shell Children to go to if need be. Please reach out if you are interested.

Please contact the ICWA Department to help us understand the barriers so we can work on getting them out of the way!

If anyone would like more information on ICWA please feel free to call me! 406-315-2400 ext. 120

What to know about ICWA: WHEN Does ICWA NOT Apply:

1. During a custody case between the parents. Even if one parent is enrolled in a Federally Recognized Tribe and the other is not.
2. IF the case is in Tribal Court ICWA does not apply.

HOUSING



APPLIANCE REPLACEMENT PROGRAMS



The Tribe is Offering Two Appliance Replacement Programs

HUD Appliance Program

- Open to those **living in Cascade County**
- Little Shell Tribal Member **Elders 62 years+**
- Appliances replaced if not energy efficient
- Low Income Household
- Funding for program is not limited

Appliances Offered:



Pembina Appliance Program

- Open to those **living in Montana**
- Little Shell Tribal Member **Elders 62 years+** or Members with **long-term disability**
- Appliances replaced only if not working or member does not have the appliance
- Low Income Household
- Funding for program is limited

Appliances Offered:



GET IN TOUCH

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(406) 315-2401 Fax

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www.montanalittleshelltribe.org

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Great Falls, MT 59404



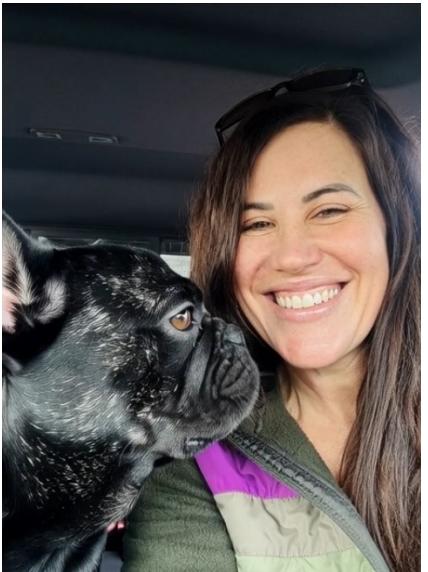
WELLNESS CORNER



WELLNESS CORNER

MEET YOUR MENTAL HEALTH TEAM AT THE LITTLE SHELL CLINIC

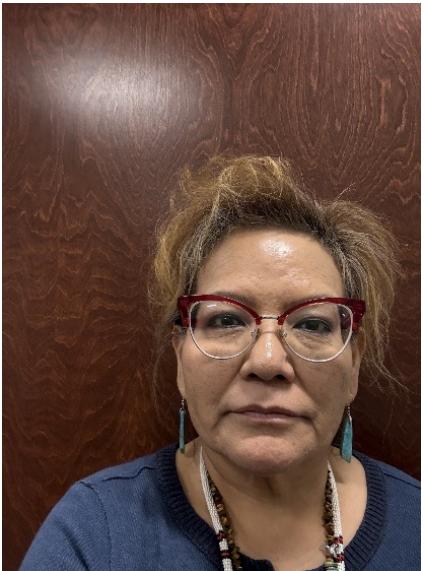
Dr. Amanda MacKinnon



Dr. Amanda MacKinnon is a licensed clinical psychologist with 25 years of clinical experience. In her role as Clinical Psychologist and the Behavioral Health Supervisor of the Little Shell Clinic, Dr. MacKinnon provides integrated behavioral health services within primary care, offers consultation on psychotropic medications, and leads the development of culturally responsive behavioral health policies that support community connection, healing, and resilience among Little Shell Tribal members.

Dr. MacKinnon holds a Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) in Clinical Psychology and a Master of Science in Clinical Psychopharmacology. She is licensed in multiple states, including Montana, and has extensive experience across tribal health, Veterans Affairs, military medicine, forensic settings, and community mental health. Her clinical expertise includes trauma-informed care, integrated primary care behavioral health, psychological assessment across the lifespan, and evidence-based treatments such as EMDR, Cognitive Processing Therapy, Prolonged Exposure, and CBT. She is deeply committed to supporting whole-person wellness and strengthening behavioral health services within Native communities. Outside of work, she enjoys backcountry skiing, bow hunting, hot yoga, and connecting with spiritual aspects of the natural world.

Sharmaine Benally



Sharmaine Benally, LCSW is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker serving the Little Shell Tribal Health Clinic. She holds a Master of Social Work from the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis and is licensed to practice in both Montana and New Mexico. With over 20 years of experience in behavioral health, much of it within Tribal and Indian Health Service settings, she brings a strong commitment to culturally responsive, patient-centered care.

At Little Shell Tribal Health Clinic, Sharmaine provides comprehensive behavioral health services including assessments, crisis intervention, and individual and family therapy. She works closely with the integrated medical team to support patients experiencing depression, anxiety, substance use concerns, trauma, and social stressors such as housing or food insecurity. Her therapeutic approach is collaborative and strengths-based in nature and draws from evidence-based practices including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), EMDR, and Motivational Interviewing. She is dedicated to supporting wellness, resilience, and healing within the community.

Taylor Johnson



Okii (Hello)! My name is **Taylor Johnson**, and I am a first-generation descendant of the Amskapi Piikuni (Blackfeet) Tribe from Browning, Montana. I completed both my undergraduate and graduate education at the University of Montana, earning bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Native American Studies, as well as a master's degree in Counselor Education. I currently work as a mental health and addiction counselor and hold LCPC, LAC, and NCC licensure.

I am proud to work with Little Shell Tribal Health, where I provide behavioral health services and support to underserved communities. Serving our American Indian population has always been my professional goal, and I feel fortunate to be doing work that I truly love. I prioritize building trusting, collaborative relationships with my clients and enjoy working with individuals, couples, and families, while honoring each person's unique story and lived experience.

Outside of work,

I enjoy hiking, skiing, reading, and spending time with loved ones. I look forward to connecting with you all

Tricia Russette



Boozhoo....My name is **Patricia "Tricia" Russette**. I am an enrolled member of the Little Shell Tribe and I am the new Prevention Specialist for the Little Shell Tribe. I am a descendant of the Renville bloodline and I am the 3rd child of a family of 7. We were a military family for a short time, and I was born in Colorado. We moved back to Montana when I was very young and have grown up in Great Falls. My spouse (Tim McGillis) and I have three "not so little anymore" children together. Charlize, Marcella and Aj McGillis. Both Tim and I having 2 adult children prior to getting together. Tim has two adult girls and I have two adult boys. We are just literally our own tribe

I was inspired at a very young age by my Indigenous program teachers to learn about my culture and Indigenous history. I was raised in Great Falls and have dabbled in several professions to find the right fit for myself and family needs. It has always been very important to me to learn about our culture from our elders and tribal members in hopes that our treasured culture is not lost.

I will be looking forward to working with you and other Tribes for all things prevention for our culture and tribe. Prevention can be so many things. Alcohol and substance abuse has long plagued our culture, in addition to old/new lifestyles that contribute to health issues (aka heart and diabetes being a few). These issues have also plagued our culture for far too long. Working on and promoting prevention will be the additional key to our Cultures/Tribes success.



WELLNESS CORNER



WELLNESS CORNER

VIRTUAL NATIVE WOMEN'S GROUP

Join us for support and empowerment every other Monday at 6pm–7pm. Led by Kim Doney McKeehan. **"We are the ones we've been waiting for."** To register, contact kimberlymckheehan@hotmail.com or k.schindele@lstclinic.org.



Created as a welcoming space for connection and support, the Native Women's Group brings women together from across distances to share, reflect, and strengthen emotional and cultural well-being.

Held in partnership with Kim Doney McKeehan, LCSW, this virtual group is rooted in compassion, cultural wisdom, and mutual respect. Whether you're joining to speak, listen, or simply be present, your voice is valued — and your presence matters.

Each session offers:

- A safe space for conversation and reflection
- Cultural grounding and shared experiences
- Encouragement and support for wherever you are on your journey

This is more than a meeting — it's a space for Native women to connect, heal, and be seen.

To join or learn more, contact Kasey at k.schindele@lstclinic.org.

You are welcome here. Always.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

WHAT IS GASLIGHTING?

Does your partner blame you for their abusive behavior or deny that their actions are hurtful? Are you starting to question your own version of events or reality in the relationship?

If so, your partner may be using a form of abuse called gaslighting, where an abuser refuses to acknowledge their actions or role in the abuse.

GASLIGHTING CAN INCLUDE WHEN YOUR PARTNER SAYS:

- "You're crazy – that never happened."
- "Are you sure? You tend to forget a lot."
- "You're imagining things."
- "It's all in your head."
- "You're just making things up."
- "You're too sensitive."
- "I don't want to hear it."
- "You're being dramatic."
- "Is that another crazy idea you got from [friend/family member]?"

What may seem like a harmless misunderstanding can become manipulative over time. If an abuser uses gaslighting to excuse or deny their abusive behavior, you may become confused, anxious, isolated and depressed, and begin to question or lose your sense of what is actually happening. In this situation, it can be very difficult to recognize that you are being abused.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M BEING GASLIGHTED?

If you think you might be experiencing this form of abuse, it's important to get help and begin the journey in learning to trust yourself again. According to author and psychoanalyst Robin Stern, Ph.D., the signs of being a victim of gaslighting can include:

- Constant self-doubt or second-guessing
- Question whether you can do anything right
- Asking yourself "Am I too sensitive?" multiple times a day
- Feeling confused and/or that you are "going crazy"
- Question whether you are "good enough" for your partner
- Feel hopeless, unhappy or joyless
- Apologizing profusely to your partner
- Find yourself making excuses for your partner's behavior to friends and family
- Feel that something isn't right in your relationship, but you can never quite express what it is, even to yourself
- Creating your own lies or mistruths to avoid the put downs and reality twists
- Find it difficult to make simple decisions
- Feel as though you have become a different person, where before you felt more confident, more fun-loving and relaxed

If any of these signs raise a red flag for you, advocates are available by calling 1-844-7NATIVE (1-844-762-8483). We are available 24/7. You are not alone.

Source: StrongHearts Native Helpline

Title: What is Gaslighting? Published by: StrongHearts Native Helpline Link: <https://strongheartshelpline.org/abuse/gaslighting>



WELLNESS CORNER



WELLNESS CORNER



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



YOU ARE NOT ALONE: SUPPORT FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Everyone deserves to feel safe, at home, in relationships, and in their daily lives. If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, please know that help is available, and you do not have to face it alone.

Little Shell Tribal Health provides confidential, compassionate support for survivors. Whether you need to explore your options, talk through your experience, or begin building a safety plan, support is here, grounded in respect, privacy, and cultural understanding.

Kasey is available to offer guidance and connection to resources. Whether your situation is recent, ongoing, or part of your healing journey, your voice will be heard without judgment. Seeking help is not a weakness, it's an act of strength. You are not alone, and you are worthy of safety and peace.

Contact Kasey at k.schindele@lstclinic.org for confidential support, information, or planning assistance.



Does your partner ever...

- Call you names or criticize you?
- Isolate you from family or friends?
- Threaten to hurt you or your children?
- Push, slap, kick or strangle you?
- Refuse to give you money for food, gas or medicine?



STRONGHEARTS
Native Helpline

Support is available at
1-844-7NATIVE

Monday-Friday from
9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. CST.

Callers reaching out after hours
will have the option to connect
with the National Domestic
Violence Hotline or to call back
the next business day. All calls are
anonymous and confidential.

Trust. Speak. Heal. Together. | strongheartshelpline.org



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MENTAL HEALTH



UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES

Mental health affects every community, but Native people often face unique challenges that are important to understand. These include historical trauma, forced relocation, loss of language and culture, and continued discrimination — all of which can deeply affect emotional and spiritual well-being.

KEY FACTS:

- Native people experience higher rates of psychological distress than any other racial/ethnic group in the U.S.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Native youth ages 10–24.
- Many tribal communities lack access to culturally appropriate care, and stigma often prevents people from seeking help.

WHAT HELPS?

Mental health services that honor Native traditions, beliefs, and identity are essential. Healing can take many forms, including:

- Talking circles and traditional ceremonies
- Connection to elders, language, and land
- Community-based programs that include cultural values
- Peer support and storytelling that builds strength through shared experience

Healing is not just about treating symptoms — it's about restoring balance in mind, body, spirit, and community.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Talk openly about mental health — help reduce the stigma
- Support youth with cultural identity and belonging
- Learn the signs of anxiety, depression, and stress
- Encourage connection to culture, elders, and tradition
- Reach out — you don't have to carry the weight alone

RESOURCES:

Mental Health America:
mhanational.org/issues/native-and-indigenous-communities-and-mental-health

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Call or text 988 anytime, 24/7

Source: Mental Health America – Native and Indigenous Communities



WELLNESS CORNER



WELLNESS CORNER

CHRONIC DISEASE AWARENESS

HEART HEALTH IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES: AWARENESS, CULTURE & PREVENTION

Heart disease is the leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native adults — a serious concern that impacts families and communities across Indian Country. While the risks are real, so are the solutions — especially when grounded in culture, connection, and prevention.

UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

Native communities face heart disease at younger ages and with higher mortality rates than other groups in the U.S. Several factors contribute to this health gap, including:

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Smoking (commercial tobacco use)
- Limited access to healthy foods and healthcare

These risk factors are compounded by historical and social challenges like colonization, loss of land and traditional foodways, poverty, and generational trauma. But Native resilience is strong — and healing is rooted in awareness and cultural strength.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

While we can't control everything, there's a lot we can do to protect our heart health and support one another: Prevention Starts with Awareness:

- Get regular checkups for blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar
- Stay active — even walking 30 minutes a day can lower your risk
- Choose heart-healthy meals when possible, using traditional foods in nourishing ways
- Avoid commercial tobacco — it's harmful to heart health (separate from ceremonial tobacco)
- Manage stress and mental health — chronic stress also impacts your heart

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE MATTER

Heart health isn't just about the body — it's also about spirit, family, and connection. Participating in cultural activities, gathering with loved ones, and maintaining strong social support all contribute to overall wellness. Many Native people find strength and healing through traditional knowledge, ceremonies, and reconnecting with the land and ancestors.

"Our culture is medicine. The path to better health includes honoring who we are."

Learn More & Take Action:

CDC: Heart Disease and American Indians/Alaska Natives

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

HARM AND REDUCTION



At Little Shell Tribal Health, we believe everyone deserves the chance to stay safe, informed, and supported — without shame or stigma. That's why we continue to provide free, confidential access to harm reduction tools for anyone who may need them.

Harm reduction isn't about judgment — it's about meeting people where they are and giving them the resources to reduce risk and protect life.

AVAILABLE SUPPLIES INCLUDE:

- Fentanyl test strips
- Naloxone (Narcan) to reverse opioid overdose
- Other harm reduction materials that support safer practices

Whether you're seeking supplies for yourself, a loved one, or your workplace, these tools are here to help — quietly, respectfully, and with care.

Taking action to protect yourself or others is a powerful step toward community safety and wellness.

For materials or more info on overdose prevention, contact Kasey at k.schindele@lstclinic.org or Trica at t.russette@lstclinic.org