



DULUTH HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IS FIRST IN STATE TO COMBINE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMUNITY CENTER WITH PERMANENT HOUSING FOR HOMELESS



March 2013 | Gimaajii Mino Bimaadizimin ("Together we are beginning a good life") is providing much needed stability for formerly homeless American Indian families in Duluth, MN. Gimaajii, a 29 unit building renovated by American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO), offers affordable, permanent supportive housing for homeless American Indians. It also houses Duluth's American Indian Center, providing cultural services to its residents. This is the first project in Minnesota to connect permanent supportive housing with an American Indian community center.

According to a 2007 Duluth United Way Community Impact Report, while American Indians represent only 3% of the Duluth population, they represent 30% of Duluth's homeless.

Gimaajii is the result of a series of community studies examining the housing and cultural needs of American Indians living in Duluth. In 2003, the Wilder Foundation, in conjunction with the City of Duluth Indian Commission, conducted an interview-based study. The study found, of homeless or precariously housed American Indians, nearly 60% had lost permanent, supportive housing because they could not afford rent or were evicted. Others reported credit problems, chemical dependency, and racism as barriers to housing.

Study participants recommended new American Indian only or Native preference affordable housing and services. Respondents indicated it was important that housing programs have American Indian staff members and incorporate traditional American Indian practices such as burning sage (smudging), pipe ceremonies, and drumming.



Noteworthy Features:

- Historic renovation utilizing both federal and state historic tax credits.
- Contains an American Indian Center, connecting residents to cultural services.
- Located downtown close to services within walking distance.
- Non-housing spaces include: art gallery, large gym, meeting rooms, computer lab, and a children's playroom.
- Offers a range of housing subsidies including: Section 8, Fond du Lac Subsidies for Band members, HUD-SHP

Units created: 29 units

Target population: Homeless, low-income Native American families and individuals.

Year Renovated: 2006 – 2011

Community Developer: [American Indian Community Housing Organization](#)

Development Partners:

Owner: [American Indian Community Housing Organization, LLC](#).

Architect: [LHB, Inc.](#)

General Contractor: [Johnson-Wilson Constructors](#)



The need for supportive housing targeted at homeless American Indians prompted AICHO, in cooperation with the City of Duluth American Indian Commission, to begin identifying potential development locations. In 2006 AICHO acquired the former YWCA building in downtown Duluth which was built in 1908. The renovation of this site allowed AICHO to preserve the historic integrity of the building's exterior while improving its energy efficiency.

Gimaajii Includes:

- 4 Efficiencies
- 6 one-bedroom apartments
- 10 two-bedroom apartments
- 9 three-bedroom apartments
- American Indian Center

In addition to permanent housing, AICHO developed the American Indian Center. Housed in Gimaajii, the center provides community events and cultural activities, a wellness clinic, art gallery, gymnasium, and meeting rooms. AICHO recently acquired Trepanier Hall, a building attached to Gimaajii, which will become an auditorium, childcare center, and office space.

Throughout Gimaajii's redevelopment, AICHO partnered with City of Duluth

American Indian Commission, Minnesota Housing, Corporation for Supportive Housing, City of Duluth, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, and Duluth LISC. Tribal support came from Grand Portage, Fond du Lac, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community and Mille Lacs, as well as many private individuals and community members.



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Funders:

- [Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community](#)
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- Minnesota Tribal Government Foundations
- Housing Investment Funds: Fond du Lac Casino Proceeds
- [Otto Bremer](#)
- [Lloyd K Foundation](#)
- [Home Depot Foundation](#)
- [Minnesota Housing](#)
- State and Federal Historic Tax Credits
- [Greater Minnesota Housing Fund](#)
- [Duluth LISC](#)/Home Depot
- Private Donations

Resident Spotlight

In December 2012, Martha and her granddaughters moved into a 3-bedroom apartment at Gimaajii. She said, "It's good to see that this place is culturally based. It has given my family a foundation to start raising my two granddaughters with structure." Martha and her family participate in support groups, attend after-school activities, and tenant meetings. Monthly tenant meetings allow residents to express their thoughts on how to improve Gimaajii. Martha noted, "the staff here are wonderful and always have a caring approach. It makes it feel like one big happy family."