A Special Invitation to Montana’s Blackfeet Indian Country

“Individuals often approached us and sat down to share their life stories...due to the good work of former volunteers. The Blackfeet always said ‘thank you’ to us for our work before the conversation was over.”

Montana’s wild and rugged beauty lures travelers from across the nation, but few tourists discover the richness of its other remote and fascinating natural wonders – its Indian Nations. In the high plains just east of Glacier National Park, live members of the Blackfeet Nation, (http://www.blackfeetcountry.com/) Montana’s most populous Indian tribe with more than 15,500 enrolled members. Blackfeet Nation hosts Global Volunteers teams during the summer. A service program with Global Volunteers in Montana enables you to work alongside Native peoples and learn about their culture and day-to-day life. From cooking and serving meals at an assisted living center to reading aloud to children at the Boys and Girls Club or painting bleachers at a horse racing stadium, there are many ways to share your experiences and talents with the local community.

Host Organization

Global Volunteers’ development partnership in Montana’s Indian country began in 1999, when the Blackfeet Tribal Early Childhood Center in Browning invited Global Volunteers to help build a cultural park designed for family recreation. Since this first team cemented our commitment to working with Native American nations, volunteers have returned to the Blackfeet Reservation every summer, and like the changing seasons, they represent a new opportunity for growth within our relationships. In addition to building mutual respect, Global Volunteers teams working with local people have helped landscape public buildings; have built picnic tables, fences, and outdoor recreation areas; and have collaborated with community leaders on services to primary and middle school students, Girl Scouts, nursing home residents, community college students, mental health program recipients, addiction treatment center clients, children in a crisis center, veterans, and participants in the Blackfeet Nation’s many summer
cultural events. Our primary host on the Blackfeet Reservation are Blackfeet Manpower, a social service organization which provides individuals and families in need with resources such as childcare, job readiness training, GED courses, and employment opportunities, and the Blackfeet United Methodist Church.

**Community Work Projects**

While our partnership with the Blackfeet Nation has embraced every region of the reservation, most work projects are centered in Browning – the reservation’s economic, government, and cultural center. Volunteer service partners include the Blackfeet Tribal Care Center, Eagle Shields Senior and Assisted Living Center, Headstart, Blackfeet Manpower, Black Methodist Church, and the Browning School District. Volunteers working on projects at these facilities have served meals, coordinated craft projects, read aloud to pre-school children, assisted with summer recreational programs, counseled youth, stimulated elders, and painted and landscaped public facilities. When serving in Native American communities, the need for flexibility is of the utmost importance.

**History of the Blackfeet Nation**

The Blackfeet name is thought to have originated from the distinctive black color of their moccasins, darkened when walking over ashes from prairie fires. The Blackfeet Nation consists of three independent tribes: the Siksika, the Kainaiwa, and the Piikani united in a Tribal Confederacy.

About three centuries ago, the Blackfeet moved westward from the Great Lakes region to their present home along the United States and Canadian border. Their relocation to the Northern Plains was an attempt to capitalize on the growing fur trade with the French in the region, and soon the Blackfeet Nation grew to be one of the most powerful tribes in the northwest, often referred to as the “Lords of the Great Plains.” But the introduction of European settlers and guns put an end to their reign. By 1880, the buffalo population, which the Blackfeet relied upon for food, clothing, lodging, and tool making, was near extinction. Hundreds of Blackfeet starved to death, causing this proud nation to become completely dependent upon the federal government for food.
In the 1900s, the arrival of religious and governmental organizations required the Blackfeet to adapt to a new educational system and follow federal regulations. The result was the erosion of the Blackfeet culture. The Blackfeet began to raise cattle, but a drought in 1919, along with low beef prices, forced many to relinquish control of their land in order to pay their taxes. Even more Blackfeet land was lost in the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which divided the Blackfeet Nation between the U.S. and Canada.

Thanks to economic revitalization – including a new casino and hotel in Browning – Blackfeet cultural traditions are being shared more broadly. The Medicine Lodge Ceremony, the Sun Dance, sweat lodges, and the Blackfeet language – preserved by tribal leaders and family activists – are offered in public settings. As a Global Volunteer, you may be invited to participate in these and other cultural events as they occur throughout the summer.

**Meals, Lodging & Transportation**

Your team will be led by a trained team leader. In cooperation with the community leaders, your team leader will facilitate your team's orientation, assist you in becoming fully engaged in the work project, and manage all project-related logistical issues.

**Meals & Lodging**

You will live and work on the reservation - lodged dormitory-style in community buildings with a kitchen and several shared bathrooms and shower facilities. Three meals a day are included in your service program contribution. You’ll prepare your own breakfast and bag lunch as a team, and enjoy evening meals such as spaghetti, burgers, and chicken prepared by a local cook. Evening cultural activities often take place over dinner or shortly afterwards. Desserts and soft drinks are available for an additional charge.

"We look forward to Global Volunteers coming each year to the Reservation. They always bring energy and inspiration to our leaders, a vision of caring to our adults, and a good work ethic to our children.

We work hand-in-hand to build a better future."

- Bob Tailfeathers, Blackfeet Community College (Browning, Montana)
**Transportation**

All airport transfers and transportation in the host community are included in your service program fee, assuming you arrive and depart within the specified itinerary. A Global Volunteers team leader will greet you at the Great Falls airport and transport you to your host community in a van. The ride is about 2 1/2 hours to Browning on the Blackfeet Reservation. Note: transportation for free-time activities is not included in your service program contribution. There is no public transportation on or to the reservation, so if you wish to explore the area outside of the host community, we recommend you drive or rent a car during your service program.

**Free Time & Sightseeing Activities**

Free-time options include exploring natural and historical attractions and participating in scheduled events such as rodeos and sweat ceremonies. In addition, volunteers may have the opportunity to attend special cultural programs held throughout the summer in the host community or in neighboring towns.

> "The plains, mountains, and forests are spectacular. The culture is fascinating. You really get a sense of history and progress, but also great sadness of what has been taken from these beautiful people. No one will leave untouched."

In Browning, the Museum of the Plains Indians is nationally recognized for its comprehensive display of Blackfeet traditional clothing and crafts. A local outfitter can take you and other team members for an evening horseback ride with advanced reservations. If you have your own or a rental car, you can explore areas of Glacier National Park adjoining the reservation, or fish or swim in one of the numerous crystal-clear lakes or streams bordering the park. Before or after the service program, volunteers have the option to tour Glacier Park or venture into Canada to visit Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park.
**Service Program Contribution**

Global Volunteer’s service program contribution covers all lodging, three meals a day, in-community team transportation, emergency medical evacuation insurance, all preparatory materials, onsite orientation, a full-time team leader, and administration costs. The service program fee is $1,095 for one week. Please ask your Volunteer Coordinator about referral credits as well as discounts for students, companions, groups, and alumni volunteers. We encourage you to use Global Volunteers’ online fundraising tool to create a personalized webpage to request partially tax-deductible donations from family and friends to help cover your service program contribution. Airfare and free time activity expenses are your responsibility. The service program contribution and airfare are tax-deductible for U.S. taxpayers.

Reserve your spot today! You CAN make a genuine difference. Call one of our volunteer coordinators at 800-487-1074 to register.

**Global Volunteers**

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