

Cecelia Firethunder is a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation, her clan is the Kiyaksa Tiospaye from the Pejuta Haka/Medicine Root District of Kyle, South Dakota. She was given her first Lakota name by the elders in her clan, which is Tawachin Waste Win (her will is good) and as an adult in ceremony the grandfathers gave her the name of a grandmother who had been watching her to carry, Mato Canali Win. She spoke only Lakota till age five, where at Catholic boarding school she learned English. Cecelia moved with her family to California on the Relocation program, completed high school and became a nurse. Cecelia co-founded the American Indian Free Clinic in Los Angeles in the '70s, and after moving to San Diego co-founded the American Indian Health Center there.



After living and learning away from home she returned to Kyle in 1987, Cecelia co-founded the Oglala Lakota Women's Society, whose work brought attention to the violence against Lakota women and children. The Oglala Sioux Tribe was the first tribe in 1989 to pass a mandatory arrest ordinance in response to the women's work. The Tribe and community also addressed child abuse/sexual abuse issues by reviewing and strengthening the children's code along with training and investigation protocols for tribal law-enforcement.

Cecelia traveled for years to tribal communities in the U.S. and spent ten years across Canada on many reserves working for wellness and healing. Of the hundreds of keynotes given, the most memorable was the Spirit of Worldwide Healing where she addressed over a thousand in her beginning period of being deaf in 2003. She was the only Native person from the U.S. invited to the gathering in Edmonton, Alberta, where the many reserves shared their projects/programs from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation grants on the impact of residential schools.

In April of 2003, soon after setting up an office for the re-election of Senator Tim Johnson, she lost her hearing. Cecelia, however, continued to work with volunteers in six of the nine districts and traveled to the University of Iowa Medical Center for evaluation and subsequent surgery for cochlear implants which allowed her to hear. Senator Johnson retained his seat and she ran for the Presidency of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and became the first woman ever chosen to lead the Tribe.

She is the President of Oglala Lakota Nation Education Coalition, Board of Directors for Little Wound School (K-12) and an elder /matriarch Tasunke Wakan Okolakiciye, Medicine Horse Society, addressing trauma in children using Lakota healing practices. She has brought schools and school leaders together to help each other on Lakota Language efforts, and after a long career in health, returned to school and is a Certified Lakota Language teacher. She is an adjunct instructor at Oglala Lakota College where she teaches Lakota Culture, Lakota Traditional Art, American Indian Women, American Indian/Lakota Psychology and a graduate course on Lakota Community Organizing. Along with her Uncle John Around Him and Cousin Robert Two Crow, Cecelia designed and created the Lakota Philosophy Exhibit at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. She makes time to work on her creative side - sewing, beading, and making dolls. She recently took the blue ribbon for her entry in the doll category after a hiatus of 29 years at the Northern Plains Tribal Art's Show

