

Organizations, communities and individuals throughout Ramsey County, across the state and nation are using principles and strategies from The Wakanheza Project to create more welcoming environments for children, young people, adults and families, working together to achieve the vision of promoting peaceful, healthy relationships and preventing family violence:

- The Minnesota Children's Museum uses The Wakanheza Project with staff and volunteers to enhance their customer service practices. The Museum has brought The Wakanheza Project to children's museums around the nation as a part of its Promising Practice Replication Award from the Association of Children's Museums. Gibbs Museum shares The Wakanheza Project with staff to enhance their experiences with visitors.
- Community-based agencies including Lifetrack Resources, HIRED and the International Institute of Minnesota are implementing The Wakanheza Project to enhance services provided to families and individuals who are working their way out of poverty, seeking employment and becoming citizens.
- The Ramsey County Provider Collaborative Project shares The Wakanheza Project with home-based childcare providers, strengthening relationships and enhancing the childcare experience for hundreds of families and children.
- The Saint Paul and Ramsey County Public Library systems use The Wakanheza Project to enhance customer service and assure welcoming, safe places for patrons and families. Saint Paul Public Library system incorporates The Wakanheza Project as a core element of their employee training and performance appraisals. Implementation has taken place in multiple libraries and systems throughout Wisconsin and around the nation.
- Women's Advocates, Inc. has made policy and practice changes to their domestic violence shelter, inspired by The Wakanheza Project, and has shared their work with shelters locally and nationally.
- Youth development organizations, professionals and caring adults are using The Wakanheza Project, resulting in creating connections, breaking isolation and identifying practices that help to build healthy relationships with and for young people.
- Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota implements The Wakanheza Project with organizations and communities throughout Minnesota and the nation.
- Minnesota Department of Education and educational systems throughout Minnesota (including Saint Paul Public Schools) are implementing The Wakanheza Project as a tool for creating more effective, welcoming learning environments.

 **RAMSEY COUNTY**  
Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health



[www.ramseycounty.us](http://www.ramseycounty.us) | [search The Wakanheza Project](#) | 651-266-2597

The Wakanheza Project™ concept and logo were developed, copyrighted, and trademarked by Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health

# The Wakanheza Project™

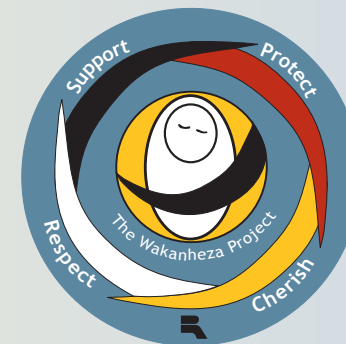
## creating welcoming environments

*"Wakanheza literally means sacred being. It is the Dakota word for child, reflecting for all of us what children really are and should be considered to be: sacred beings."*

Gabrielle Strong,  
Grotto Foundation  
Native Language Revitalization Initiative

We have all witnessed or experienced parents having difficult times in public with their children, and times when we may have felt uncomfortable with young people. People often would like to help out and make the situation better, if they knew what to say or do.

The Wakanheza Project™ teaches individuals, agencies, businesses, and communities to use principles and strategies that prevent or de-escalate stressful situations in public to create more welcoming environments for children, young people, families, and adults.



The Wakanheza Project™ concept and logo were developed, copyrighted, and trademarked by Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health

**The Wakanheza Project™ is built around 6 principles that allow individuals and communities to better connect with and provide welcoming, healthy environments and interactions for children, young people, and families.**

### **The Wakanheza Project Principles**

**Judgment:** Recognize, and then suspend our judgments of others. If you approach a situation judging what you perceive to be a badly behaved parent/adult or young person, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for you to connect in an understanding and helpful way.

**Culture:** Open ourselves to all cultures and the opportunity to better understand differences so that we may share kindness with all people.

**Powerlessness:** Understand that many/most acts of violence arise from a sense of powerlessness. This appreciation can change our perception of people's reactions during times of high stress.

**Empathy and Respect:** Embrace our ability to show understanding and genuinely offer to help.

**Environment:** Recognize that environments have significant impacts on behaviors. Create physical and social environments that enhance people's sense of feeling cared about and welcomed.

**The Moment:** The Wakanheza Project is about freeing ourselves to suspend judgment, understand the impacts of powerlessness and environment, appreciate culture, and practice empathy and respect in the moment.

**Below are strategies to help create welcoming environments.**

### **What You Need To Do Before You Act**

**Acknowledge your own judgments:** While it is difficult if not impossible to stop making judgments, we can choose to acknowledge our judgments and put them aside.

**Assess the environment:** Intentionally look at the situation to understand what is going on in order to find options to help others. If you see people in danger of serious harm, alert the appropriate authorities.

**Assess yourself:** Quickly decide whether you can step into the situation. If you think you may be able to help, intervene early. If you think you may make the situation worse, find someone who can help.

**Act in the moment:** We cannot change the past or predict the future. What we can do is offer genuine empathy and help in any given moment.

### **Here Are Some Ways To Help**

**Offer assurance** through a smile or a nod.

**Show empathy** and imagine yourself in the other person's shoes.

**Distract or redirect** their attention away from the stressful situation.

**Find something positive** to say about the child, young person, or adult.

**Offer encouragement** about something positive that you see in the situation.