

Celebrate Family Fun Month!

Source: [Family Fun Month Guide](#)

There's a new crispness in the evening air, and the sun seems to set earlier each night. Leaves are fading from green to orange, while back-to-school supplies are taking over shelves. Yes, summer is winding down, but Family Fun Month is just beginning!

Before your family gets devoured by chaotic routines of school, work and extracurricular activities, take some time to enjoy the fleeting days of August a little differently. Recruit your family to help give back to the community with our charitable tips for Family Fun Month. Trust us, the memory of helping others as a family unit will last a lifetime!

Spend a day in nature

Pack a picnic and a Frisbee and head to your local park for a day of fun in the sun. As your day winds down, have every family member pick up—or fish out—five pieces of trash to help keep the area clean and beautiful for the next pack of picnickers to enjoy.

Plant a garden

Inspire your kids' budding green thumbs by planting a late-summer vegetable garden. Carrots, broccoli and cauliflower all do well when planted this month. Being able to watch the fruits of their labor flourish will inspire family members to eat more veggies and start conversations about food literacy. Get started with a five-step guide to planting a home garden. Bonus sixth step: start a compost system!

Collect items for a shelter

Inspire your kids to start the new school year off with a clean slate by donating their gently used clothes and toys to a local shelter. Drop off the donations as a family to teach kids how their treasured wares bring can happiness to other children when shared. If you Marie Kondo'd too much in the spring, create care packages instead. Be sure to check with each individual shelter to see what items they're most in need of.

Set up a lemonade stand

The tried-and-true summer staple is a great way to meet your neighbors and spend some time in the sunshine before winter's chill creeps in. Pick a cause that's important to your family and donate the proceeds of your sweet sales to charity! Remember to let your customers know where their money is going with a homemade sign!

Write a card

Make summer a little brighter for children or seniors stuck in the hospital by writing letters or sending stuffed animals to your local hospital. Fact: spreading kindness releases serotonin, improving any back-to-school woes.

Take action

After spending a week at ME to WE's Take Action Day Camp, youth will be transformed into change-makers! After meeting new friends, building their leadership skills and growing their confidence, kids will come home with the inspiration to change the world, not to mention an action plan to help turn their passion into a real-life social impact. Bonus: their efforts can help them earn a ticket to WE Day!

Host a talent show

Whether your home is full of little Kelly Clarksons, budding Dierks Bentleys or future Cleo Wades, host a charity talent show in your own backyard to let kids (and adults!) show off their skills for a good cause. Charge friends, family and neighbors \$1 for admission and donate the proceeds to a cause close to your family's heart.



August 2026 Calendar

*National Breastfeeding Month
National Immunization Awareness Month*

- 1 – World Lung Cancer Day
- 1 – Lammas Day (Christianity)
- 2 – American Family Day (US)
- 3 – Martyrdom of Imam Reza (Islam)
- 4 – Assistance Dog Day (International)
- 7 – Purple Heart Day (US)
- 11 – Death of Prophet Muhammad (Islam)
- 15 – Feast of the Assumption (Christianity)
- 15 – World Honeybee Day
- 16 – Onam (Hinduism)
- 19 – World Humanitarian Day
- 21 – National Senior Citizens Day (US)
- 26 – Women's Equality Day (US)
- 27 – Ullambana (Buddhism)

Host a charity sports event

If you'd rather pick up a hockey stick than a microphone, host a neighborhood sports day! Whether your crew is more into road hockey, baseball or basketball, charge teams \$5 to sign up, then create a schedule so everyone has a chance to play. At the end of the day, the winning team gets to choose where to donate the funds raised. Get started with five tips to host a fundraiser.

Head to the beach

End the summer on a relaxing note by spending a day building sandcastles and frolicking in the waves, while starting a conversation about environmental conservation. Here's a thought-starter: "Is your sunscreen reef-safe?"

Volunteer

Use your family's individual skills to make a difference in your community! If you're bilingual, spend a Saturday teaching English to new citizens—Cusco International has placements across North America. Or, if you're a savvy cook, ask family members to don aprons with you and head to your local community center to help serve up nourishing fare for those in need. For parents with high schoolers glued to their phones, redirect your teen's attention from their Instagram to a local non-profit in need of volunteers to run their social channels. Not only will this get them their required volunteer hours, it'll teach them the value of using social media for good.

Take a trip

It's never too late for a family vacation! Have the adventure of a lifetime on a ME to WE Trip to Kenya, India or Ecuador. Immerse yourselves in a new culture, while simultaneously having the opportunity to be a part of a community's transformation. Get packing!

'Language carries many things': How Minnesotans are preserving six rare languages

Source: [Language carries many things](#)

Languages are portals to other countries and communities. They reveal more than how people speak — they're a window into history, geography, tradition and sometimes forgotten folklore.

In Minnesota, you don't have to travel far to come across a language that you may not have heard — or even heard about.

While it may come as no surprise that Minnesota's top three languages, after English, are Spanish, Hmong and Somali, several rarer languages and dialects are also spoken here.

Every four years, the U.S. Census Bureau releases state-specific language data, which highlights languages spoken at home. Last year, Sahan Journal reported on how this linguistic diversity reflects a changing state. But beyond numbers, the data also reflect Minnesotans' efforts to preserve some languages spoken by a small group.

We profiled the Minnesota speakers of six rare languages who, in their own ways, are preserving those tongues for the next generation — and by doing so, also keeping alive their cultures, histories and traditions.

Amina Baha, refugee services director, SEWA-AIFW

When Amina Baha was in high school, she won a presidential award. She was eager to share the news with her parents, who are from Afghanistan but immigrated to America from Pakistan.

She explained to her father, in English, the importance of the award. But he had no reaction. "I got frustrated, and I was upset," she said.

Baha repeated the news, but still got no response from her father. Then, after her mother prodded her, she realized why. "I had to switch gears, and when I told him in Pashto, he got up and gave me a hug, and said he was very proud of me, and he knew that I could do it," she said.

Baha's relationship with languages and literature has been shaped by her father, who, like Baha, speaks Urdu, Farsi, and Pashto, along with English. She is one of about 115 people in Minnesota who speak Pashto, an official language in Afghanistan spoken by the Pashtun people.

"He made sure that I spoke Pashto as well as Farsi at home," she said. "He would not talk to me or respond unless I spoke in one of those languages. It was really frustrating as a child to go through that, but as I got older, I realized the importance of knowing other languages, especially such rare languages.

"There's a saying in Pashto that, the more languages you know, that's how many people you can communicate with," she said. "I came to appreciate what he was trying to do, or what he did, and how much of an impact that has on my life today."

As refugee services director at SEWA-AIFW ("sewa" is a Hindi word meaning "to serve," while AIFW stands for Asian Indian Family Wellness), Baha uses her language skills to reach the people she works with. "It broadens my world and my understanding and just awareness of how close we are," she said.

Baha described Pashto as "very poetic," "expressive" and "colorful." In Pashtun culture, people often express their emotions through poetic, rhyming couplets called "landay," spoken and sung by women at weddings. Pashtun people also sing "tappay" at weddings as well as in times of grief. "I don't think something like that exists in any other culture," she said.



For Baha, it is important that her son and daughter speak Pashto and Urdu — her husband is from Pakistan. Baha said she notices in her work with South Asian immigrant families that parents often push their children to learn English first and put their native language second.

“I wish more people would focus on the preservation of language, regardless of what language you speak,” she said.

Beatrice Jua Wisseh Hinneh, clinical supervisor and Liberian language teacher

In 1989, Beatrice Jua Wisseh Hinneh traveled from Liberia to California to seek medical treatment for her daughter, who had a heart condition. She then visited her sister and a friend in Rhode Island, planning to return soon to her family in Monrovia, the Liberian capital. Except, she couldn't.

A war, one later known as the First Liberian Civil War, tore through the country, and Hinneh found herself stranded in America with her sick daughter. The war lasted 14 years, five years into which Hinneh found a home in Minnesota's Brooklyn Park where she could “start life all over again.”

“It was heartbreaking,” Hinneh said. “I left my youngest daughter [in Liberia]. My grandmother died. My sister died in the war. I have a lot of family members that died in the war.”

Hinneh comes from the Kru tribe of Grand Kru County in southwest Liberia. “They are tough-headed, very resistive to torture, and to hardship,” Hinneh said.

In Minnesota, where she joined Kru associations and met other immigrants from the region, speaking the Kru dialect helped her feel more at home.

The Kru tribespeople's dialect is part of the Niger-Congo language family. Traditionally seafarers, hunters and warriors, Kru men were hired by U.S. and European navies to patrol for illegal slave ships after the trans-Atlantic slave trade was outlawed.

In Liberia, a former American colony whose official language is English, Hinneh spoke Kru at home and English in school. “When the settlers came to Liberia, our Indigenous languages, like Kru, the Pele, the Basa, were played down,” she said. “You had to speak English to belong.”

Hinneh, who now teaches Kru to adults and children via Zoom classes, said it was essential for her people to know their tribal dialect in Liberia — sometimes for the sake of their lives.

“During the war, they [the rebels] were looking for people from certain tribes to execute,” she said. “And so they would ask you, ‘What tribe are you?’ And they will ask you to speak the dialect, and if you couldn't speak the dialect, then they knew you were lying. And so a lot of people lost their lives. So you use language to communicate for your life.”

For Hinneh, it is important that her children learn the language, know “where they come from.”

“It gives you a sense of belonging — that I'm a Kru woman,” she said. “I've always been a Kru spirit. Whether alone or with people, I've always had it in myself.”



Lamar Renville, Dakota language teacher at Bdote Learning Center, descendant of Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate

Growing up in Montana, Lamar Renville had no contact with their Dakota identity. They were one of only two Native students in their school, didn't know their father — who was Dakota — and didn't even know which tribe they were from.

While supporting the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 and reading Black authors, they discovered how systemic racism affected both Black and Indigenous people.

“As a Dakota person, my entire story had been erased, and that was very much a part of what happens with systemic erasure of Native Americans in the United States and Canada,” said Renville, who until recently was unhoused. “It became very apparent that my whole adult life being homeless is directly tied up with all of that.”

Eager to learn more, they delved deeper into their Dakota identity, starting with learning the language, which is spoken by about 750 people in Minnesota. “I've reoriented my entire life around it,” said Renville, who now teaches the language to Dakota and Lakota students at the Bdote Learning Center in Minneapolis. Renville is one of just five licensed Dakota language teachers in Minnesota.

Renville's great-great-great-grandfather, Gabriel Renville, worked with missionaries to create the written form of the Dakota language. Despite that connection, Renville is the first family member in three generations to speak the language after learning it for three years and teaching at the center for two years.

“I'm really grateful for my position in the school, because during the school year, I get the opportunity to speak Dakota every day,” they said.



For Renville, teaching has become a way of remedying the erasure of their own identity in their school years in Montana. “I was the problem because I had brown skin, and so I was treated differently,” they said. “I personally get to undo that for these kids by being a different influence and knowing how it could impact them to not have that in their life. And this is all through the language.”

Access to the language came with extensive research on the tumultuous history of the Dakota people in Minnesota, Renville said. The Dakota consider Minnesota their ancestral home, with origins linked to Bdote in present-day Fort Snelling. The devastating U.S.-Dakota War in 1862 was followed by the hanging of 38 Dakota men in Mankato, the largest mass execution in U.S. history, and the forced removal of most Dakota people from Minnesota.

But the Dakota language is embedded in Minnesota, Renville said. “Minnesota itself is ‘mini shota,’” they said. “‘Mini’ is water and ‘shota’ means smoky. And I’ve been told that it’s the reflection of the clouds in the sky. Everywhere you go in Minnesota, there’s place names that are in the language. And so, it’s really the language of the land here.”

For Renville, the language has been a portal not just to history but also to community. They have reconnected with their family and reservation Dakota communities. They are also creating TikTok videos in the Dakota language to connect with young people. “The language has been a really strong gateway to making connections with other Dakota people and feeling like I’m a part of a community, and it’s a really hard community, because there’s a lot of trauma,” Renville said.

Renville also teaches the language to their 8-year-old daughter, who lives in Florida. “I give my daughter a weekly allowance to learn Dakota, because there’s not really any incentive to speak it in Florida,” they said.

A poet and an author, Renville’s dream is to make Dakota a mainstream language through online classes, TikTok and YouTube videos — with the goal of not only reaching Dakota children, but also their parents. “My goal moving forward as an artist is to incorporate the language into everything,” they said.

Kalsang Dickey, nursing assistant and Tibetan language teacher

Kalsang Dickey’s way of serving Tibet from Minnesota is by preserving the Tibetan language. Dickey, 52, a nursing assistant, has been teaching Tibetan to kids from kindergarten to eighth grade at the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota for 16 years.

Growing up in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, Dickey didn’t realize until she was in her teens that Tibet isn’t synonymous with China, which took it over in 1950.

The Tibet she was born and grew up in had its own culture, language and history, but life under Chinese rule was full of restrictions and forced acceptance of a different culture. “My memory of Lhasa is very beautiful, and some are very sad,” she said. “The beautiful part is that my family is still there, childhood friends and my schoolmates. The sadness is that we lost the country. There’s no freedom of speech, no freedom of religion.”

In Tibet, she spoke Ütsang, the most popular Tibetan language dialect, at home, and Mandarin in public. She learned some Hindi when she moved to India at the age of 21 “to find freedom for myself,” and began learning English when she came to Minnesota in 1997.

“When I came to Minnesota, nobody knew Tibetans,” she said. “When I said Tibetan, they always called me Japanese. Even my lawyer didn’t know where Tibet is. He thought it was in India.” As of 2013, the U.S. Census reported just under 1,300 Tibetan speakers in Minnesota.

In her early years in Minnesota, Dickey wrote letters to her family in Tibet because phone calls were too expensive. She wrote in Tibetan to her mother and in Mandarin to her siblings. Dickey said it was her way of making sure she didn’t forget either of those languages.

But as phone calls became more accessible, she started to lose touch with the Tibetan language. “Sometimes, when I tried to write something, I felt like, ‘How should I write this?’” she said.

Dickey took her children to the Tibetan school before she was asked to join as a teacher. “Every time my daughter spoke Lhasa dialect very nicely, the older teachers were really happy with that,” she said. “So when I dropped her off at school, one of our principals always asked me to join the school to teach Tibetan. But I didn’t have the confidence to go teach the kids.”

That principal eventually persuaded Dickey, saying, “If you want to serve the Tibetan government, and the Dalai Lama, this is how you can.”

“That’s how he convinced me,” she said. “Then I was like, I think I can do that. So I accepted that teacher position.”

Her resolve was further strengthened in 2016, when she visited Tibet for the first time since moving to Minnesota. “I noticed lots of Tibetan kids speaking Chinese rather than Tibetan,” she said. “Just like here, where some parents only speak English at home with kids, over there, parents were speaking only Chinese at home. It’s like erasing all the culture from them, kind of brainwashing.”

Dickey, a cancer patient, took a break from teaching when she was ill, but soon returned to it. “This is my life’s joyful work,” she said. “My family wanted me to rest. I said, ‘I don’t want to leave; I want to do this continually.’”

An admittedly “strict teacher,” Dickey said she worries “the language will vanish in 30 to 40 years” and wants to keep pushing students and their parents to speak it.



“Languages are our roots, the cultures, heritage, everything is our roots,” she said. “If we don’t have languages, culture, then, just like a tree, if you don’t have the roots, then the tree is gonna die.”

“I can’t do too much, but this is one of the biggest things, [helping keep] our culture alive.”

Joffre Iban Gonzales Yupangui, Kichwa speaker

The province of Cañar, located in southern Ecuador between the western and central Andes ranges, is home to the Cañari, an Indigenous group with roots in pre-Incan civilizations. That’s where Joffre Iban Gonzales Yupangui was born before his family moved to Minnesota three years ago.

Joffre, now 16, was brought up around the folklore, spiritual and cultural traditions, and Kichwa language of his people. He has always spoken Kichwa and Spanish. Now a student at Lincoln International High School in Minneapolis, Joffre seeks to share his language and culture.

“I dedicate myself to promoting the language, teaching, and also preserving my native culture and trying to preserve other cultures that are currently being persecuted and silenced by the government in Ecuador,” he said in Spanish through an interpreter.

Speaking their Indigenous language came at a price for his parents, Maria Petrona Yupangui Simbaña and Carlos Fernando Gonzales Grand. “[For] the landowners, especially in the 1970s and ’80s, for the mestizos [mixed-race people of Spanish/Portuguese and Indigenous descent], speaking in Kichwa was like a sin,” Yupangui Simbaña said, also in Spanish and through an interpreter. “For speaking Kichwa they would mistreat us, beat us, and not pay us for our work.”

Even in Minnesota, she said, Spanish-speaking Ecuadoreans ridicule their language and urge them to speak only in Spanish.

But she passed on her native language and the resolve to preserve it to Joffre. “From my perspective as a mother, I’ve communicated in both languages [Kichwa and Spanish],” she said. “It’s our ancestral language, our own mother tongue, Kichwa. So we have to value it. It’s not because we like it or because we want to, but because it shows who we are, where we come from, what roots we have, what blood flows in our veins.”

Joffre credited his mother with teaching him the language, and for instilling the pride that now drives his advocacy.

While his language is embraced among his teachers and school peers, Joffre sees more reluctance to accept Kichwa among Ecuadoreans in Minnesota from his parents’ generation. He said the trauma of past exploitation continues to shape how families experience the present, creating a lasting sense of fear rooted in what earlier generations — including his own parents — endured under systems of forced or exploited labor.

But with the younger generation, “I do see a great interest in learning, not only about the culture, but also about the history,” Joffre said. “Because history is what keeps us alive.”

His mother agreed. “History touches the heart of knowing, to reopen the history book and see what happened, now, why would you lose it? It’s a history or culture where you open the book and gain strength — where I come from, who I am, and how I am, and where I need to go.”

Zakaria Amin, Kurdish language teacher at Moorhead High School

In his hometown of Erbil, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Zakaria Amin worked as a translator for the U.S. Army after the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. That work helped the English-language graduate further sharpen his English-speaking skills. Now a resident of Moorhead, in western Minnesota, Amin works to bolster Kurdish, which is spoken by just over 300 people in Minnesota, according to 2013 U.S. Census language data.

Amin teaches the language to Kurdish American children as part of Moorhead High School’s English Learner program. He is also a project manager with the Kurdish American Development Organization.

“Language is not only the speaking part,” Amin said. “Language carries many things — norms, ethics, traditions, culture, identity.”

Kurds, who live in parts of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, are one of the world’s largest ethnic minority groups without a state of their own. That makes it all the more important to speak and preserve the language, Amin said.

He said his goal in teaching the language is to better connect Kurdish families, whose elders speak Kurdish while their younger relatives born in America often don’t. “They understand each other, but they are not speaking the same language,” he said.

For Amin, the language is infused with memories of Erbil, where he was born. “Every single corner of the city is part of my memory,” he said. “This cannot be detached from me and from my personality and identity. So for me, practicing language is a must. Now I have to teach people how to do that.”

Amin, who is a father, insists on speaking Kurdish at home with his family and English when out in public. “There are certain people who are probably getting aggravated if they see other people are speaking different languages,” he said. “I know that English is not the only language in America by law, but I still care about other people’s feelings, and we try to speak English as much as we can outside.”



New Staff Profile: Diana Pelagio Rios



Diana Pelagio Rios is the newest member of our Spanish team at Medical Interpreting Services (MIS). Originally from Mexico City, Diana moved to California at the age of 17. As she adapted to life in the United States, she became fascinated by the diversity of people, cultures, religions, and traditions she encountered. Her curiosity about how culture and life experiences shape the way people communicate and view the world inspired her to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Anthropology at California State University, Sacramento. Diana graduated with Honors in 2018 and believes her studies gave her a deeper appreciation for cultural differences while reinforcing the importance of empathy, respect, and meaningful human connection—values that continue to guide her work today.

Shortly after graduating, Diana began her career as a Spanish interpreter with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), facilitating communication between providers and clients from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. She later joined the HOPE Anti-Trafficking Program as a caseworker serving survivors of human and labor trafficking throughout Northern California. Working directly with survivors and collaborating closely with interpreters gave her the unique opportunity to experience communication from both perspectives—as both the interpreter and the provider—deepening her appreciation for the vital role interpreters play in patient-centered care.

After taking a brief break from her career, Diana realized how much she missed serving her community and returned to interpreting with Language World Services. She quickly transitioned from a flexible interpreter to a full-time onsite medical interpreter and later earned her Certified Healthcare Interpreter™ (CHI–Spanish) credential.

Working alongside physicians, nurses, and multidisciplinary healthcare teams, Diana discovered a passion for healthcare. As an onsite medical interpreter, she became an integral member of the care team, helping patients and providers communicate during some of life's most vulnerable moments. The opportunity to work across a wide range of medical specialties strengthened her passion for medical interpreting and inspired her to pursue a long-term career in healthcare.

Today, Diana is excited to be part of the UC Davis Health team and looks forward to serving the diverse communities of Northern California with compassion, professionalism, and cultural humility.

Outside of work, Diana enjoys traveling, learning about different cultures, exploring new foods, and spending quality time with her family.

Welcome to the team, Diana! We are excited to have you here!