

2019 Walking Shield Annual Report

Walking Shield experienced an outstanding year of providing services and programs for American Indians on and off reservations. Through unique partnerships with OneSight, the Department of Defense and many others, we are able to leverage large resources to help our Indian communities resulting in over a million dollars in services this past year. The following synopsis of our work illustrates how meaningful these services were in improving the quality of life for our Indian people.

OneSight Partnership

Walking Shield, in partnership with OneSight conducted three vision clinics in 2019. The vision clinics provide a comprehensive eye exam for each individual who attends. Individuals that need glasses receive a brand-new pair which are made onsite the same day. The clinics were conducted on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, the Elk Valley Rancheria in Crescent City, California and the Karuk Tribe in Yreka, California.

The Blackfeet Vision Clinic was very unique because it was held in the summer from June 3 to June 7, 2019. The previous year, we conducted a vision clinic during the school year with a focus on the students. While we were there the Tribal Council requested another clinic be offered to the entire community in 2019.



Walking Shield Staff attending a planning meeting with Blackfeet Tribal Council

The effort required some intense strategic planning to be able to achieve a community-wide family event that would be a success for all those involved. One of the greatest challenges in rural communities such as Blackfeet is transportation. Often times families need to decide between gas in the car or food on the table. To offset this situation, Walking Shield collaborated with the Tribal Council to utilize all its transportation resources to overcome this barrier. In addition, Walking Shield set up a working committee of Blackfeet Tribal department directors to enroll families to attend this clinic. This committee included the Blackfeet Community College, the Pre-K to 12th grade school district, Tribal Health Department, Indian Health Services and representatives from the Tribal Council.



L to R: Karuk Vice Chairman Robert Super, Marvin Thurman (Walking Shield), Karuk Chairman Russell Attebery

The results were a tremendous success. We provided 1,483 individuals with a complete eye exam of which 87% needed glasses. Those who needed glasses were able to choose from over 120 frames varying in styles and colors. Approximately 95% of these glasses were made onsite. The balance of glasses that required specialized lenses were sent to the OneSight labs in Cincinnati and delivered to the Tribe two weeks later.

The OneSight clinic in Crescent City, California involved three tribes and the Del Norte School District. The host tribe was

the Elk Valley Rancheria and the collaborating tribes were the Yurok Tribe and the Tolowa Dee-Ni' Nation.

Our goal was to help approximately 1,000 students and adults at the vision clinic which was conducted during the week of September 23 to September 27, 2019. We assisted 968 individuals with a complete eye exam of which 54% needed



Dr. Castillo and Del Norte School Superintendent Jeff Harris

glasses. As with Blackfeet, 95% of the glasses were made onsite, the balance was made offsite and sent back to Tribal leadership. Del Norte School Superintendent Jeff Harris visited the clinic and commented on how organized the process was, from transportation to ultimately receiving their new pair of glasses.

Walking Shield's final OneSight clinic was in collaboration with the Karuk Tribe and several of the surrounding schools in the Yreka area. As with the other two Tribes, Walking Shield Staff met with Tribal Council and school officials multiple times throughout the year to ensure a successful effort. We assisted 1,360 individuals with complete eye exams and 993 needed glasses. Most glasses were made on-site and the balance were sent to the Tribe two weeks later.

Finally, there are at least three clinics planned for 2020:

- Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota which is in the poorest county in the United States (Oglala Lakota County).
- A clinic in rural San Diego County to help the non-gaming tribes and the local community in need of assistance with vision care.
- The final clinic will be another community-wide clinic similar to the one held at the Blackfeet Reservation earlier this year; it will be held at the Leech Lake Reservation in Minnesota.

There is a possibility that will do a fourth clinic for the Yaqui Pascua Tribe in Arizona next year as well.

Education

Walking Shield was able to assist over 1,000 students with scholarships, wraparound services and college preparation activities in 2019. Walking Shield's Education Program Emergency Fund provided 223 students with financial assistance to include books, tuition, housing assistance, gas, food and living expenses. An additional 800 students received wraparound services to include FAFSA workshops, academic advisement, mentoring/coaching services and college application assistance during the 2018-2019 academic year.

In June of 2019, 20 students graduated from our program with college degrees. During this academic year our Education Program awarded 64 scholarships. Scholarship recipients also received wraparound services which include tutoring, mentoring and additional financial assistance for school related expenses. College preparation is a key component of PARGE (Prepare, Retain, Admit, Graduate and Employ). In 2019, we expanded PARGE by increasing the amount of college preparation resources and increased the number of workshops in conjunction with academic advisement services.

Walking Shield's impact is measured by the sheer number of students we have successfully guided through the college application and enrollment process. Once enrolled, we continue to mentor and provide the direction and support necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of obtaining a college degree. Through our successful PARGE case management system, over 80 students have graduated with four-year degrees since the program's inception in 2010. Many of these graduates are gainfully employed within Native American Tribes or Indian service programs.

One of our students, Hayley Argo, recently graduated this year and described her experience as a participant in our education program: "Walking Shield helped ease my financial strain enough so I could work less hours and focus on my education. The staff at Walking Shield are so kind and supportive, I can't thank them enough for how much they care."



*Hayley Argo
California State University Long Beach
Finance Major, Class of 2019*

We are proud of all of our students. In 2019/2020, our funding was renewed by Los Angeles Scholars Investment Fund (LASIF) to provide another \$157,000 in scholarships. Likewise, San Manuel also renewed funding of \$60,000 to continue providing wrap-around services for our students. We are planning to assist another 1,000 students realize their dream of attaining a college diploma. Finally, Walking Shield held its 9th Annual Charity Golf Tournament on October 21 and was able to raise additional funds for our Education Program.

Housing Relocation

One of Walking Shield's premiere programs is the Housing Relocation Program. Walking Shield is the only nonprofit in the United States that has first right of refusal for excess homes for all military branches and in all 50 states. The Department of Defense has valued these homes at \$50,000 per home. To date, the 1,235 homes that Walking Shield has been able to transfer and relocate to reservations totals a value of \$61,750,000 million dollars.

Currently, we have initiated the transfer agreement for another 22 houses from the Minot Air Force and the Three Affiliated Tribes in North Dakota. In addition, the Spirit Lake Tribe in North Dakota requested homes, as well as the balance of all the appliances currently in the homes available to be relocated. In late October 2019, we were informed that there are more homes in Pine Bluff Arkansas (built in 2008) that are available to be relocated. We have contacted several tribes who are interested in these homes and who are in the process of hopefully having them transferred to them.

Innovative Readiness Training Program – Healthcare and Infrastructure

Walking Shield has partnered with the Department of Defense to provide much needed assistance to reservations in need to help improve the quality of life within their communities. The Innovative Readiness Training Program (IRT) provides infrastructure support (engineering) and healthcare assistance for American communities in need. The IRT program is a joint service program under the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense/Reserve Affairs (OASD/RA).

In 1994, Walking Shield, Inc., created Operation Walking Shield as a joint civil-military cooperative program. This program is designed to offer opportunities for military personnel to utilize their skills and talents to improve the quality of life for Native Americans living on our nation's Indian reservations, while at the same time enhancing their deployment readiness.

The first Operation Walking Shield projects were strictly related to engineering. However, in 2000 during an Operation Walking Shield infrastructure project (taking place on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota), a medical team accompanied the engineers in the event there were any health-related problems. Once on the reservation, the medical team became acutely aware of the urgent medical needs of the community and they began to assist at the local Indian Health Services hospital. After this successful assistance, Walking Shield approached the Department of Defense to formalize health/dental care IRT rotations as well as infrastructure projects for participating reservations.

To date, Walking Shield's coordinated medical deployments have provided much needed services to over 137,00 American Indians. Hundreds of miles of roads, new bridges, dams, water wells, new homes and much more has been done to improve infrastructure conditions on reservations across the United States. In 2019, the IRT Program concentrated on healthcare deployments on the Hoopa Reservation in California, Spirit Lake in North Dakota and Fort Peck in Montana.

In July 2019, Walking Shield met with the Pentagon's IRT Commander Colonel Jay Scott and his staff to increase infrastructure deployment and healthcare deployment across the United States for the upcoming years. General Smiley from the California National Guard also attended this meeting and committed to do 2-3 healthcare deployments and at least one infrastructure project per year in California. The IRT program has made a huge difference in helping our Indian communities.



Exec. Dir. Dr. Castillo (center) and Program Manager Marvin Thurman (far right) are pictured with Brigadier Gen. Jeffrey Smiley from CA National Guard (rt of Dr. Castillo) and Col. Jay Scott from the Pentagon (left of Dr. Castillo) flanked by their representatives

Humanitarian Aid and Holiday Gift Distribution Program

The Humanitarian Aid Program and the Holiday Gift Distribution Program is the first and longest-running program Walking Shield has offered to some of the most impoverished Tribes in the United States. The Humanitarian Aid Program started as a result of our founder Phil Stevens' first visit to Pine Ridge. When he saw the degree of poverty, he returned home and immediately started to send humanitarian aid and supplies. In the subsequent year at another visit to Pine Ridge, a grandmother approached Phil with a doll whose head had come off. She said, "we are good seamstresses here on the reservation, but some things can't be fixed." Phil started the holiday gift program in 1987 to remedy this situation.

As reflected in our annual audit, Walking Shield distributes over 300,000 humanitarian aid products and holiday toys each year. We are very fortunate to have long-term partners such as Hasbro and the Toys for Tots Native American Program who generously contribute to this effort. We also receive numerous donations of children's product from a variety of different companies. Other products such as handmade knitted items, (i.e. blankets, beanies, mittens, scarves, etc.) and handmade wooden toys are donated by many other civic groups.

The most recent addition to our family in the past two years is our friends from Football for Life. Their purpose is to help reduce suicide rates on Pine Ridge Reservation by utilizing football as a vehicle to build self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth. Football for Life's efforts are making a positive difference and the support has been remarkable.

Employment and Training

Walking Shield's most recently launched program is the Workforce Development and Training Program. In collaboration with the United American Indian Involvement who has been awarded the U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Grant for Indian and Native American Program, Walking Shield serves the American Indian community residing in Orange County. This program provides job seekers access to employment training, support services, and the education necessary to succeed in today's competitive job market. The program's goal is to provide a long-term career path to low income, unemployed, and under-employed American Indians to minimize the disparities they face in the workforce.

The program strives to promote employment development in the Orange County American Indian community in accordance with traditional cultural beliefs and values. The program is designed to prepare and support American Indians ages 16 and up, (including our Indian elders) with job skills, and provide the training necessary to obtain gainful employment. The focus is to remove barriers and develop more fully the academic occupational literacy skills of individuals. In 2019, Walking Shield will provide approximately \$175,000 in services; in 2020 we will provide over \$200,000 in services.